

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Ring in the new year across Europe
Travel magazine, inside

Frankfurt, Germany



45th Medical Company returns home for holiday
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AP tells BCS to stop using its poll in rankings
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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2004

50¢

Suicide bomber thought to be cause of Mosul blast

First reports spoke of aerial attack; soldiers sweep city Pages 3-4



Wounded begin arriving at Landstuhl

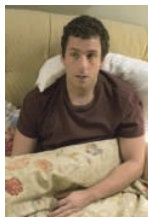
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MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes
A soldier wounded in the attack on the American base in Mosul, Iraq, is loaded onto a bus at Ramstein Air Base. At nearby Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, trauma surgeons and volunteers prepared as more than 40 wounded in the explosion at the dining facility were flown in Wednesday night on a U.S. Air Force C-141 Starlifter.

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News Tracker ... What's new with old news

States

School experiment relaunched:

Nearly two years after their experiments were destroyed in the Columbia shuttle explosion, U.S. high school students are getting a second chance to see how space affects everyday things such as hair, flowering seeds and plant food.

This time, the work of the students at 11 high schools across the United States will be on board an unmanned Russian supply rocket headed for the International Space Station. Its launch is scheduled for Thursday.

Chicago high-rise fire: Investigators have determined that the downtown high-rise fire that raged for 5½ hours earlier this month was caused by an electrical malfunction.

At least 37 people, including nearly two dozen firefighters, were injured in the Dec. 6 fire on the upper floors of the LaSalle Bank headquarters. The stubborn blaze required more than 300 firefighters to bring it under control.

The fire started in the space above a ceiling on the building's 29th floor, but officials do not know the exact point where it began or what sparked it, said Lt. Anthony Martin of the Chicago Fire Department.

Bus evacuation meeting: Local and state officials involved in a test evacuation of schools last week plan to meet privately to figure out what went wrong, leaving nearly 1,000 students without bus transportation.

A clear picture of the glitches that undercut the Dec. 16 evacuation — and what changes can be made to the area's evacuation plan — will be the focus of Wednesday's meeting, several emergency officials said Monday.

The private meeting will include representatives from the local school district, the town of Brattleboro, Vermont Emergency Management and the Laidlaw bus company of New Hampshire.

World

Iceland rejects U.S. request: Iceland has rejected a U.S. request to drop the offer of a residency permit for former American chess champion Bobby Fischer, officials said Tuesday.

U.S. Ambassador James Gadsden had asked the country last week to withdraw its offer because Fischer is wanted in the United States on criminal charges on charges of violating international sanctions against Yugoslavia for playing chess there in 1992.

But on Monday, Foreign Secretary David Odsson invited Gadsden to a meeting and told the U.S. ambassador that the Icelandic government stood by its offer, Icelandic officials said.

Gadsden was told that Iceland wanted to recognize its historic connection with Fischer, who has been held in great esteem here since winning the chess World Championship in Reykjavik in 1972.

Austrian cable car fire case: A U.S. appeals court has ruled that class action status and a single liability trial are not appropriate for families of victims of a cable car fire in



Violence continues in Thailand: A Thai soldier guards Buddhist monks on their morning rounds Nov. 9 in Pattani, Thailand. Muslims in the south have long complained of discrimination within the predominantly Buddhist country and have risen up several times in modern history in attempts to form a separate state. Meanwhile, thousands of teachers planned to walk off their jobs starting Thursday, saying the government has failed to protect them from Muslim rebels blamed for killing three of their colleagues in recent weeks.

Austria four years ago that killed 155 people.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan, N.Y., said a lower court judge had made a mistake in analyzing how U.S. laws would permit such a case to proceed.

Martin J. D'Urso, a lawyer for eight plaintiffs named in the lawsuit, said the appeals court ruling cuts off an avenue that more than 100 potential plaintiffs overseas were counting on. He said he did not know whether the ruling would be appealed.

The ruling could force families to press lawsuits separately in American courts, rather than as a group in U.S. courts — a much more costly proposition, D'Urso said.

The plaintiffs alleged that the companies were responsible for train and tunnel defects that caused the deaths in Kaprun, Austria.

Eight Americans died in the Nov. 11, 2000, accident, including a family of four and a newly engaged couple, when fire engulfed a cable car going through a mountain tunnel.

U.S. protests in Cuba: Thousands of Cuban university students rallied outside the U.S. Interests Section in the capital to protest the mission's Christmas display supporting local dissidents.

The students listened to speeches and waved signs with socialist slogans and images of revolutionary icon Ernesto "Che" Guevara at Anti-Imperialist Plaza near the mission.

Government media on Tuesday estimated the crowd at 5,000.

International media based in Cuba were not invited to Monday's night's event.

Madrid train bombings arrest: A Spanish judge charged a Moroccan suspect with ter-

rorism and mass killings for allegedly helping plan the March 11 Madrid train bombings, court officials said.

Hasan al Haski, 41, was charged with 191 counts of murder, 1,000 counts of attempted murder and belonging to a terrorist organization, said a court official on condition of anonymity.

Al Haski, arrested in the Canary Islands last week, was jailed pending trial last Tuesday, following further questioning by Spain's main anti-terrorism judge, Baltasar Garzon.

The charges came after hours of questioning at the National Court by Judge Juan del Olmo, who is leading the investigation into the attacks that killed 191 people.

Jihad tapes found: Authorities found two audio cassettes urging jihad in the house of a man being retried on charges he aided the Hamburg al-Qaida cell that included three of the Sept. 11 suicide hijackers, a federal agent testified Wednesday.

The cassettes were found by police in the bedroom of Mounir el Motassadeq two months after the Sept. 11 attacks, agent Joerg Effelsberg testified.

El Motassadeq, 30, is being retried on more than 3,000 counts of accessory to murder and membership in a terrorist organization on suspicion he provided logistical support for suicide hijackers Mohamed Atta, Marwan Al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah.

The tapes glorified fighting holy war, or jihad, Effelsberg told the court.

The trial broke for the holidays after Wednesday's testimony, and is scheduled to resume Jan. 4.

Stories and photo from The Associated Press

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Landstuhl gets some of Mosul wounded

BY BEN MURRAY
Stars and Stripes

LANDSTUHL, Germany — The aftermath of Tuesday's deadly explosion at a U.S. military dining facility in Iraq began to reach Europe's military medical hub Wednesday, where 41 wounded troops and civilians arrived for treatment.

At Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, trauma surgeons and volunteers prepared for the influx of wounded from the explosion that rocked a chow hall in Mosul. In all, 13 U.S. soldiers were killed and 69 American soldiers, civilians and Iraqi security personnel were wounded in the attack, according to media reports.

Some critically injured patients arrived at Landstuhl late Tuesday. Another military plane arrived at nearby Ramstein Air Base at about 4 p.m. Wednesday. Eight of the patients were hurt badly enough to be on ventilators, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Chaplains prepared to minister to the incoming wounded and medical teams around the area were put on two-hour call.

Landstuhl spokeswoman Marie Shaw said the influx of wounded was a heavy load but not as intense as the steady stream of injured during the recent battle in Fallujah, Iraq.

"That's a lot at one time ... [but] we're not overwhelmed yet," Shaw said Wednesday.

Many of the patients on Wednesday's flight had broken bones, shrapnel wounds and abdominal injuries from a blast that was initially reported as a rocket strike.



Volunteers on Wednesday pore through letters sent to troops at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. The group helped chaplains at the hospital make up hundreds of holiday gift packets for patients and wounded soldiers. The volunteers, are, from left, Ariana Jeske, Carolyn Nichols, Amy Nichols, Brad Hedden and Stephanie Nichols (partially hidden in background).

However, the cause of the explosion is being investigated, according to media reports.

As of Wednesday, 18,434 patients from the Iraq theater had been treated at the hospital for all types of injuries since the start of the war, Shaw said.

While medical teams waited for the arrival

of the patients, support services around Landstuhl also were mobilizing.

A spokeswoman for the Fisher House, which provides free lodging to families of seriously wounded patients at the hospital, said staff members were already making reservations and preparing rooms for new guests.

In the Landstuhl chaplain's office, Chaplain (Maj.) David Bowerman said he and his fellow chaplains would be "praying for strength, praying for guidance," as they prepared to minister to the wounded, their families, hospital staff — and each other.

Outside Bowerman's office, rows of boxes lined the hallway, filled with gifts and cards sent from people wishing wounded troops a happy holiday.

About 10 volunteers were working Wednesday to sort the gifts and assemble them in packages to be handed out to patients over the coming days. They also folded donated clothes for troops whose uniforms had been cut off during medical treatment in the field.

One of those volunteers, Michele McCaslin from Los Angeles, has been giving her time at Landstuhl since the beginning of the month, living at a nearby hotel so she can walk to the hospital to help.

McCaslin said she wanted to volunteer while her son, Spc. Mark Bishop, is deployed to Iraq — at a base just south of Mosul, she said.

"I was pretty dumbstruck," she said when she heard about the attack Tuesday. Though she later found out her son was unharmed, the news still weighed on her, she said.

"When you're a mother and you've got a son downrange ... you feel like you're a mother to all of them," she said.

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Military says suicide bomber carried out attack

General Myers: Attacker appeared to have improvised explosive device strapped to body

Staff and wire reports

Tuesday's explosion in the dining hall at a base in Mosul, Iraq, was caused by a suicide attacker wearing some kind of explosive device, said Gen. Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on Wednesday.

"At this point, it looks like an improvised explosive device worn by an attacker," Myers told Pentagon reporters Wednesday.

The explosion, which killed 22 people, including 13 U.S. servicemembers, and wounded 69, including 44 troops, was originally attributed to a mortar or rocket attack on the facility at Forward Operating Base Marez, which had been targeted often in the past.

FOB Marez is a military camp for U.S. and Iraqi government forces.

Five U.S. civilian contractors and three Iraqi security force members, including one non-U.S. person, were also killed in the attack.

Seven U.S. contractors, five Department of Defense civilians, two Iraqi civilians, 10 contractors of other nationalities, and one of unknown nationality and occupation also were wounded.

Twenty-five of the 69 wounded were returned to duty.

Many of the wounded as was seen on TV are being transported now to Landstuhl Army Medical Center in Germany.

In Iraq, hundreds of U.S. troops, backed up by armored vehicles and helicopters, on Wednesday blocked bridges and cordoned

off areas of Mosul where insurgents have mounted attacks.

The operation in the nearly deserted city came a day after one of the deadliest incidents for U.S. troops in Iraq.

Initial reports said that a rocket had ripped into the tent.

Later, however, a radical Sunni Muslim group, the Ansar al-Sunnah Army, claimed responsibility, saying it was a "martyrdom operation" — a reference to a suicide bomber.

Regardless of the cause, the apparent sophistication of the operation indicated that the insurgents probably had inside knowledge of the base's layout and soldiers' schedule.

There was little apparent sympathy for the dead Americans on Mosul's empty streets. "I wish that 2,000 U.S. soldiers were killed," declared Jamal Mahmood, a trade union official.

The U.S. military said they had expected an increase in violence as insurgents attempt to disrupt the political process and derail elections for an assembly that will draft Iraq's new constitution.

"Insurgents, who have everything to lose, are desperate to create the perception that elections are not possible," said Gen. George W. Casey, the commander of multinational forces in Iraq.

"We will not allow terrorist violence to stop progress toward elections."

Mortar attacks on U.S. bases, particularly



MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

An unidentified casualty is lifted into an ambulance at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Wednesday. Some 50 patients, most of whom were injured during Tuesday's attack in Mosul, Iraq, arrived at the U.S. base on Wednesday after a flight from Balad, Iraq.

ly on the huge white tents that serve as dining halls, have been frequent in Iraq for more than a year. Just last month, a mortar attack on a Mosul base killed two troops with Task Force Olympia, the reinforced brigade responsible for security in much of northern Iraq.

About 50 people — most of them injured soldiers from Mosul — arrived on an Air Force C-141 transport plane at Ramstein Air Base in Germany for treatment at nearby Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, said Maj. Mike Young, a base spokesman.

The hospital said at least eight were in critical condition. Landstuhl spokeswoman Marie Shaw said. With a light snow falling, some wounded were carried out on stretchers, while about a dozen were expected to be well enough to walk off the plane.

In the immediate aftermath of the occupation of Iraq in April 2003, Mosul was cited as a model success story by U.S. commanders. But armed opposition has mounted steadily, especially since last month's U.S.-led operation to retake the rebel-held town of Fallujah.

Military was building safer bunker

U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

New hall would have replaced attack site

BY MATT KELLEY
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Worried about recent artillery attacks on American mess halls in Iraq, the U.S. military had nearly completed a reinforced dining area near the mess tent where an insurgent attack killed 22 people.

Iraqi insurgents have attacked several U.S. military dining hall tents with mortars or rockets over the past few months. On Tuesday, before the hardened dining hall at Forward Operating Base Marez could be completed, an explosion ripped through a tent where hundreds of troops were sitting down to lunch.

Defense Department officials initially said a 122 mm rocket caused the blast, but on Wednesday military officials in Iraq said they were investigating the possibility of an explosive planted in the tent or brought in by a suicide bomber.

The military was building a bunker-like mess hall at the Marez base as part of continuing efforts to make the base safer. Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz, commander of the multinational force in Iraq, said the new facility was due to be completed in February.

"We recognized the threat," Metz said Wednesday in television interviews. "We've been looking at the force-protection parameters, not only for dining facilities, but for other places we have large gatherings."

Attacks from rockets or mortars — what the military calls "indirect fire" — have been common at U.S. bases in the Mosul area, as well as other insurgency hot spots in Iraq. Dining halls are a prime target because they offer a readily identifiable place where lots of troops congregate at predictable times.

For example, a mortar round hit near the mess hall of a U.S. base in Tikrit during dinner one night in March. The round didn't explode and no one was injured. Insurgents also launched rockets that month which exploded near a large military dining hall within Baghdad's Green Zone where U.S. and Iraqi government offices are located. Another mortar round injured three soldiers at a dining hall on another Baghdad base in February.



An injured civilian employee that worked in the dining facility at a base near Mosul, Iraq, is loaded into the back of a Stryker vehicle after an attack on the dining facility Tuesday.

"It is extremely difficult to prevent these appalling and horrific attacks," said Wendy Hall, spokeswoman for Halliburton Co., the Army contractor that provides food services in Iraq.

Halliburton said it lost several employees and subcontractors in the attack.

At many bases — including Marez — troops have been required to wear their body armor and helmets while in the dining hall because of the threat of attack. Most of the attacks don't hit any structures or cause any injuries, however.

Still, one soldier was killed near the dining

hall at Marez in a mortar attack in May, and two soldiers were killed in November when mortars exploded in their living area on the same base.

Maj. John Nelson, the battalion's chief surgeon, told a reporter earlier this year about plans for a possible attack on the dining hall. Nelson told the Portland (Maine) Press Herald that military statistics showed that if a 60 mm mortar shell hit the dining hall with 400 soldiers inside, an estimated 12 would die no matter what medical could do.

President Bush said Tuesday's deadly attack should not derail Iraqi elections scheduled for next month and that he hoped relatives of those killed would find solace in the service their loved ones provided.

As of Tuesday, at least 1,319 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 1,021 died as a result of hostile action, the Defense Department said. The figures include three military civilians.

The AP count is 19 higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated at 10 a.m. EST Tuesday.

The British military has reported 75 deaths; Italy, 19; Poland, 16; Spain, 11; Ukraine, nine; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Thailand and the Netherlands, two each; and Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary and Latvia one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 1,181 U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 912 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

Since the start of U.S. military operations in Iraq, 9,981 U.S. servicemen have been wounded in hostile action, according to the Defense Department's weekly tally.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ An attack on a mess hall near Mosul on Tuesday killed 15 U.S. servicemen.

■ The latest identifications reported by the military:

■ No new identifications reported.

Families of Mosul victims try to get information

BY CHRIS L. JENKINS
The Washington Post

RICHMOND, Va. — The call came to Patricia Otto's home at dawn, waking her from a restless sleep. Her husband, Lt. Shawn Otto, a 40-year-old soldier stationed with the Virginia National Guard in Iraq, was on the other end of the line.

"He said, 'I just want you to know that I'm OK,'" she recalled from her Williamsburg home.

"You're going to hear about some horrible stuff that's happened today. I can't say anything more ... but I'm OK."

Thus began a day of fear, relief and sorrow for Trish Otto, 38, and dozens of others with loved ones in the Richmond-based 27th Engineer Battalion, the Virginia Na-

tional Guard unit that was among those attacked Tuesday by Iraqi insurgents outside the northern city of Mosul.

There was relief for families that heard directly from relatives telling them they had survived. There was fear, because others hadn't had any direct reports. There was sorrow because family members felt the pain of others who might have their worst fears confirmed.

Despite extensive news reporting on the attack, the families had little direct information.

"That's the hardest part about this for so many," said Melissa Doss, 32, of Henrico County. She did know that her husband, Capt. Chris Doss, also 32, was not wounded.

As the organizer for families of the guardsmen, she had received a flurry of e-mails and calls from worried people looking for answers.

"It's been a hard, hard day," Doss said. "Many of the families are in turmoil, trying to understand what's happened and if their loved ones are OK."

Just two weeks ago, the support group held a family day for the soldiers' children and spouses.

Virginia's leaders expressed support for the families of the guardsmen, who have been in Iraq since March and are scheduled to come home by the first week of March 2005.

"This further reinforces the enormous sacrifice ... of these citizen soldiers," Democratic Gov. Mark Warner said in front of

the governor's mansion. Warner said he had spent time with the battalion exactly one year Tuesday, as they were being deployed to Fort Dix, N.J., before shipping out for Iraq.

"These are our bravest men and women who are putting their lives on the line to protect the freedoms that we all enjoy," Republican state Attorney General Jerry Kilgore said.

The 27th Engineer Battalion, which Virginia Guard officials said can trace its history to Colonial times, has a mission that is shared by companies throughout the war-torn country: finding and removing land mines, securing bridges, building fortifications. Its soldiers also are responsible for securing the border with Syria, where many insurgents are thought to be slipping through.

U.S. construction company drops out of Iraq contract

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An international construction company has pulled out of its contract to rebuild Iraq's transportation system, deciding it was too dangerous to stay, a spokesman for the U.S.-led reconstruction effort said Wednesday.

Contract International Inc. withdrew from their contract last month after a surge in attacks on reconstruction efforts, said Lt. Col. Eric Schnaible of the Pentagon's Project and Contract Office in Baghdad.

"It's hard to do construction in a place where people are shooting

at you or intimidating your work force," Schnaible said in a telephone interview. "It's a challenge across the country."

The PCO has taken over management of about 18 subcontractors working on transportation projects, Schnaible said. He said Contract's pullout was "a mutual-

ly agreed-to separation" and does not signal a larger movement by U.S.-based companies to abandon Iraq.

"Some parts of the country are a whole lot more permissive than others," Schnaible said. "Where we can get the work done, good things are happening."

Contract President Karim Camel-Toueg did not immediately return telephone messages left at the company's Arlington, Va., offices Wednesday.

Security concerns have been a major reason for the slow pace of reconstruction which has frustrated Iraqi and U.S. officials alike.

Serving up Christmas where it's needed



Sgt. Shelley Landry, right, and Spc. Selina Ray, center, of the 256th Brigade Combat Team, help decorate the dining facility at Butler Range, a relatively isolated base where 10 members of the 256th will be assigned for Christmas.

PHOTOS BY JOSEPH GIORDONO/Stars and Stripes

Troops helping to bring feel of Louisiana to isolated comrades

BY JOSEPH GIORDONO

Stars and Stripes

BUTLER RANGE COMPLEX, Iraq — Soldiers of the 256th Brigade Combat Team are working to ensure all their comrades, especially those at relatively isolated locations outside the main camps, get a taste of the holiday spirit.

This week, a group of officers and enlisted soldiers flew by helicopter from Camp Liberty (formerly Victory North) to Butler Range, bearing gifts, decorations, mail and well wishes for a small detachment of 256th soldiers assigned there for the holidays.

The range, a small, wind-swept training camp a few hours' drive from Liberty, is staffed by small detachments from various units in the area. Ten soldiers from the 256th will be there for Christmas, before rotating back to Liberty at the end of a 30-day stint.

"They can't make it to us for Christmas, so we're making sure we bring a little bit of it to them," said Col. John Angeloz, deputy brigade commander for support.

At Camp Liberty, the 256th will throw a big party — complete with traditional Louisiana food and music. The brigade's 3,000 soldiers, mostly from Louisiana, are making arrangements to transport fresh, hot meals to Butler Range for Christmas. Normally, soldiers there eat T-rations or Meals, Ready to Eat.

"It's not much," Sgt. Josh Louviere, 22, from Breauville Bridge, La., said of Butler Range.

The camp hasn't been hit by mortars or rockets, he said, and there's just enough entertainment around to pass the time. What he'll miss most for the holidays is the gumbo his grandmother makes every Christmas Eve.

The dining facility at Camp Liberty will be serving gumbo, he noted, just as it did for Thanksgiving.

"But something tells me it won't be quite as good," Louviere said.

Like the other 256th soldiers at Butler Range, Spc. Darrik Jefferson, a 25-year-old from Boyce, La., splits his 12-hour workdays



Spc. Selina Ray of the 256th Brigade Combat Team decorates a Christmas tree at Butler Range.

between six hours of manning a checkpoint and six hours of doing other jobs on the camp.

More than any of his family's Christmas traditions, Jefferson will simply miss his family. Especially his kids.

"It's not bad," he said of Butler and the holiday plans. "It could be better, but it's not bad."

Spc. Selina Ray, a 22-year-old supply soldier from Broussard, La., was one of the soldiers bringing the gifts and decorations. At Camp Liberty, she'll try to re-create some of her family's Christmas traditions.

She has a small Christmas tree in her room and plans to open her gifts on Christmas Eve, just as she would at home.

"Other than that, I'm sure it won't really feel the same," she said, as she and a young Iraqi boy strung lights on a plastic tree in the Butler Range chow hall.

"I might try and do a Web cam with my family," Ray said, "but for sure I'll give them a call."

E-mail Joseph Giordono at: giordono@pstrips.osd.mil

Seasons Greetings,
Sgt. Delbert Jensen

*Your friends and co-workers at Noramco
want to wish you a Happy Holiday!*



Family get offers of help to access son's e-mail

WIXOM, Mich. — Offers of help have been pouring in for a Michigan man who is trying to persuade online giant Yahoo! to allow him access to the e-mail account of his son, a Marine killed in Iraq.

From lawyers to computer-code crackers, people across the nation have come forward wanting to help the family of 20-year-old Justin M. Ellsworth, who was killed last month during a foot patrol in Iraq.

"Oh, my God. It's been incredible," said John Ellsworth, Justin's father. "It's an overwhelming response... Things are really moving. I'm very encouraged by it all, but I still have my reservations."

Yahoo! is standing by its policy of protecting the privacy of its e-mail subscribers, spokeswoman Karen Mahon said.

One man started an online petition Tuesday to pressure Yahoo! to allow access to the account. Lawyers have offered free legal services and other people have offered money to help the family pay costs they might incur. Two computer forensic examiners have offered to crack the mystery of the e-mail password for free.

The policy of Yahoo! is to erase the entire account after it has been idle for 90 days. It's not known when Ellsworth last used the account. He died Nov. 3, meaning the account would have been erased by Feb. 1.

From The Associated Press

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Air ambulance unit back in Germany

After 11 months in Iraq, 45th Medical Company returns home for holiday

By STEVE LIEWER
Stars and Stripes

KATTERBACH, Germany — Little Eduardo Rivera III just couldn't wait till his papa came home.

The 9-pound, 4-ounce boy was born at 2:10 a.m. Tuesday, just one day before his father—Sgt. Eduardo Rivera Jr. of the 45th Medical Company—arrived home to Katterbach from an 11-month tour in Iraq.

Eduardo III was much too little to brave the German winter for Wednesday's homecoming, but his four sisters showed up to meet their dad. So did his mother, Tanya Rivera, who talked the doctors into letting her out of the hospital so soon after delivering.

"I begged them to let me go, so I could come here and see him," Tanya Rivera said. "We're going to see [the baby] today. We hope he'll be home by Christmas."

"It's been tiring, frustrating," Sgt. Rivera said. "I wanted to get back home for my daughters."

The Riveras were among more than 100 families that got an early Christmas gift Wednesday when the air ambulance unit returned home ahead of schedule. Better still, the company did so without a combat loss.

The company spent most of its deployment in Taji, a bombed-out former Iraqi air force base north of Baghdad. During the year, the unit flew more than 3,823 patients on 2,500 medical evacuation missions. Its UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters racked up 4,550 flight hours.

"It hasn't really sunk in that we're home," said Maj. Christopher Knapp, the company commander.

That the deployment ended well did not mean soldiers and their families found it easy to end. Stephanie Corr had to cope alone with repeated visits to the hospital after her daughter Alisa, 3, was diagnosed with epilepsy.

"That's been the hardest part," she said.

Earl Rhoden, a former soldier now serving in the Army Reserve, held two balloons and a red rose as he waited for his wife, Sgt. Latoya Rhoden. They've been together for 10 years,



Sgt. Sean Smedley of the 45th Medical Company hugs daughter Mackenzie, 3, after the unit returned to its home base of Katterbach, Germany, on Wednesday. The air ambulance unit had been deployed to Taji, Iraq, since January.

and married for two.

"This is our first deployment split-up," he said. "It's been a challenge, but we survived."

Capt. Tress Van Heusen of the 235th Base Support Battalion in nearby Ansbach predicted that the 45th Medical's return will boost spirits in Katterbach. Most of the soldiers belong to the 1st Infantry Division's aviation brigade, which remained in Iraq but is expected home within the next three months.

Sonia Martin
wife of Sgt. Donald Martin

"It's good for the community," she said. "Everybody sees the light at the end of the tunnel."

And just in time for the holidays.

"We're really glad they're going to be home for Christmas," said Sonia Martin, who brought sons Phillip, 13, and Lawrence, 11, to greet their dad, Sgt. Donald Martin. "That's the best present."

E-mail Steve Liewer at: liewers@mail.strips.com



Sgt. 1st Class Vito DiChristina of the 45th Medical Company was one of more than 100 soldiers and officers that returned to Katterbach after an 11-month deployment to Iraq.

At 53, recall by Marines is 'important' to Pa. man

By CAROLYN KASTNER
The Associated Press

LEBANON, Pa. — At age 53, retired Marine Col. Frank Ryan is going back to duty to serve in Iraq. The accountant with 32 years of active and reserve military duty got a phone call from the Marine Corps' manpower office in August.

Officials wanted to see if he would come out of retirement to serve in Iraq.

Could he pass the physical? Was he interested? Yes, he said, he would be ready to go. "Being able to be part of this is very important to me," he explained.

On Nov. 3, his orders came in the mail, marked "Involuntary Presidential Select Recall." This was no longer a courtesy call.

He would deploy on Dec. 5 to serve as deputy chief of the multinational force in Iraq. Ryan's assignment: to be responsible to the chief of staff and commanding general to coordinate the planning and operations of ground forces.

In preparation for deployment, Ryan started jogging four times a week to lose the 20 pounds he had gained while running unsuccessfully for a congressional seat in central Pennsylvania.

He had to close his accounting business temporarily and refer his current clients. He had to finish landscaping the front yard.

One of the hardest parts of the deployment for Ryan was stopping the adoption of a baby girl from China. And he had to prepare his four grown children and his wife, Sherrie. He was going into Iraq early.

Ryan joined the Marines as soon as he turned 18, at the height of the Vietnam War.

His son, Matthew Ryan, 22, enlisted with the Pennsylvania National Guard right out of high school. He will be commissioned in May and he graduates from Penn State. He has chosen the infantry and expects to be sent to Iraq.

In the period before his deployment, Ryan prepared himself mentally for combat.

"I tell this to any of my young Marines: You are going into a different world and have to be prepared for just about anything," he said. "They can't afford to take anything for granted."

Another aspect of mental preparation is what he calls "personnel accountability."

"It is real easy to wake up in the morning and say, four kids, my wife, three dogs. I'm covered," he said. "Now I need to know where everybody is every second of the day, and ... You can't take your eye off of one person even when he calls 'personnel accountability.'"

GIs with combat experience offered recruiting deal

By LISA BURGESS
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Army is offering soldiers with combat experience two weeks temporary duty in the recruiting station closest to their own hometown to help recruit new members.

And to sweeten the pot, once their recruiting obligations are completed, soldiers can take personal leave, "as long as their commander approves" the extra time off, said Julia Bobick, a spokeswoman for the Army's recruiting command at Fort Knox, Ky.

But soldiers can't take advantage of the deal while they are still deployed, because of the costs of bringing people back to the United States from places such as Iraq, Bobick said in a Tuesday telephone interview.

Neither can soldiers who are stationed overseas use the new program as a way to get a free trip home, Bobick said.

But if a soldier is enlisted, stationed in the United States, is 25 years old or younger, and has served overseas in support of Operations Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom, he or she can apply for the Special Recruiter Assistance Program, or SRAP, arrangement, Bobick said.

In fiscal 2004, which ended in September, the Army National Guard missed its recruiting target of 56,000 new soldiers by nearly 7,000 enlistees, or more than 12 percent.

The active Army recruited 77,587 soldiers, or 100.8 percent of its goal, according to the Army's Recruiting Command.

For the Army Reserve, the command recruited 21,278 soldiers, or 100.4 percent of its goal.

The goal for fiscal 2005 is to bring in 80,000 new soldiers for the Active Army and 22,175 soldiers for the Army Reserve.

As of Nov. 29, the last date for which numbers were available, recruiters had signed up 13,767 new soldiers for active duty and 2,292 new soldiers for the Reserve.

During the 14-day recruiting duty, soldiers "have to put in a full 40-hour week" working with personnel in the recruiting station, Bobick said.

After an orientation by the battalion public affairs officer, soldiers in the program may be called on to speak at college and community events, or participate in interviews with local media, Bobick said.

Soldiers can claim reimbursement for travel expenses and will receive per diem for their temporary duty assignment time.

Not everyone who applies may get accepted into the program, Bobick said.

Applicants must be screened, which takes about a week, and the first lieutenant colonel up their chain of command must sign their applications, Bobick said.

To apply for SRAP, go to the U.S. Army Recruiting Command's Web site at www.usarec-army.mil, or call (502) 626-0448/1582.

E-mail Lisa Burgess at: burgessl@strips.com

State calls for cleanup of old base

CAMP EDWARDS, Mass. — State environmental officials have asked the military to pick up trash and dilapidated equipment left behind from decades of military training at Camp Edwards on Cape Cod.

The junk, including items such as a decaying airplane fuselage and engine parts, isn't a threat to the Cape's groundwater or the environment, state Environmental Officer Mark Begley said.

But he said the debris' continued presence conflicts with the spirit of state law governing military activity and environmental stewardship.

"Better management of the debris out there is a way to reduce impact to the habitats," Begley told the Cape Cod Times for a story Wednesday.

Lt. Col. David Cunha, commander of the Environmental and Readiness Center on the base, agreed that the junk should be removed.

"If we're not going to use it, we should get rid of it," he said.

The military has already begun cleaning and refurbishing long-neglected areas of the base by hauling away old bunkers and removing other metal debris left over from a training drill on responding to a nuclear, biological or chemical attack.

Camp Edwards, the northern portion of the 22,000-acre Massachusetts Military Reservation, was used from 1911 until 1997 for target practice,

and by defense contractors testing and disposing of munitions.

Two Ghost Fleet ships sold for scrap

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — Two more obsolete Ghost Fleet ships on the James River will be scrapped, the U.S. Maritime Administration announced Monday.

Bay Bridge Enterprises of Chesapeake will dispose of the Shirley Lykes for \$860,000, Deputy Maritime Administrator John Jamian said during a news conference near the fleet, anchored off Fort Eustis.

Another ship, the Neosho, will go to International Shipbreaking Ltd. of Brownsville, Texas. That contract is for \$1, since higher steel prices and better ship conditions make the ship less costly for the scrapping yard to dismantle.

"Six months ago, we stood right here and promised that by the end of the year we would have disposal contracts on 10 'high-priority' ships. We've done it," Jamian said. "Not only do we have disposal contracts on all 10 of those ships, but we are now disposing of two additional ships."

With Monday's announcement, 29 ships have been removed from the James River Reserve Fleet and 43 ships have been contracted for disposal since 2001, according to the agency.

From The Associated Press

Raptors grounded after Nev. crash

The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Flights of a next-generation stealth fighter were grounded nationwide Tuesday while investigators at Nellis Air Force Base combed the wreckage of one that crashed during testing, the Air Force said.

The pilot of the F/A-22 Raptor ejected shortly before the crash Monday and was taken to a hospital.

He was not seriously injured, said Capt. Maureen Schumann, an Air Force spokesperson.

Schumann said Raptors nationwide have been temporarily prohibited from flying while the crash, the first of an Air Force F/A-22, is investigated.

It was not immediately known what caused the crash or when the planes would resume flying, she said.

All flights at Nellis were also temporarily grounded.

It was the second crash involving a fighter at Nellis in as many months, Schumann said. A Navy F-18 went down Nov. 9 just north of the base.

The pilot of that aircraft also ejected.

The Raptor crash comes at a critical time for the costly F/A-22 program, which is in operational trials intended to lead to deployment with combat units.

There have been many questions raised about the need for the program and the cost of the planes — \$130 million.

Unlike its predecessor, the F-15 Eagle, the F/A-22 can fly at supersonic speeds for long ranges.

But critics have said the military's current fighters have proven capable of matching every air force and air defense network they have faced since the end of the Cold War.

Loss of NASA deal prompts contractor to reduce workforce

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — As many as 1,000 Lockheed Martin Corp. employees will be cut after the defense contractor lost a NASA deal to a competitor.

The \$1 billion contract for the space agency went to Sverdrup Technology, which expects to absorb many of the affected employees.

Lockheed officials said they had held the contract overseeing all of NASA's engineering and science support services for Johnson Space Center, for 42 years.

Sverdrup officials are waiting until the contract award made last week goes through a standard protest period for the losing bid, which will end in early January.

"In transitions like this, the vast majority of employees continue in similar roles," said Janet St. James of Jacobs Engineering, Sverdrup's Pasadena, Calif.-based parent company.

Space agency officials said the Sverdrup bid was more attractive in a time when NASA government contracts are more highly scrutinized for both cost and efficiency.

"The contract process is something that is followed closely," said NASA spokesman Doc Mirelson in Washington.

"Within this particular con-

tract, an appropriate award was made."

Under the new contract, Sverdrup would provide engineering products and services for the International Space Station, space shuttle and other spacecraft programs performed at Johnson Space Center. Over five years, the contract is valued at \$1.2 billion.

The space agency planned a debriefing in the first week of January to explain its selection, said Lockheed.

"We strongly believe we are the best team for the job," said Meghan Mariman, communications director for Lockheed's space operations in Greenbelt, Md.

Lockheed officials are trying to help employees with the transition.

"We are recommending that our employees consider the possibility of employment with the new contractor," said Mariman.

She said around 1,000 people are involved in the ground services contract at Johnson Space Center, from design engineers to maintenance personnel.

Lockheed has about 1,800 full-time workers and 1,200 contractors in the Houston area.

Based in Tullahoma, Tenn., Sverdrup Technology provides engineering support to NASA and the Defense Department.

The company was purchased by Jacobs Engineering in 1999.

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Study: Removal of Navy officers on rise

Lead investigator finds commanding officers punished for personal misconduct cases

BY LEO SHANE III

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The number of Navy officers removed from command has risen dramatically, but a series of personal failings was to blame, rather than a problem with the promotions system, investigators said Wednesday.

The Navy's lead investigator noted that personal misconduct cases — things such as sexual improprieties and alcohol abuse — have accounted for the sharp rise.

From 1999 to 2002, only eight commanding officers were "detached for cause" due to personal behavior. Over the following 18 months, until June 2004, 19 officers were punished for those failings.

Overall, 38 commanding officers, about 1.5 percent of the Navy's non-flag commanders, were detached from January 2003 to June 2004. Only 37 had been removed from command in the previous four years.

The Navy study, released Wednesday, dismisses major operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as factors in the increase, noting the service always holds its se-

nior members "to the highest of personal and professional standards."

Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John B. Natanson echoed those statements, saying he was pleased the investigation found no systemic problems in the chain of command.

"A commanding officer's duties are to complete a mission successfully and to provide the conditions of success," he said. "The behavior of a commanding officer must be proper. It implies you have to lead by example."

Nathan said many of the personal behavior failings have occurred just before or immediately following deployment, which he thinks might show officers "letting their guard down" before and after missions.

Navy investigators noted that since June, only two officers have been removed from command, which they see as a sign the 18-month increase was just an anomaly.

But the report does recommend instituting a refresher course on behavior and responsibilities for all commanding officers, developing a self-assessment

tool for commanders to monitor their actions, and creating a peer evaluation tool to provide another performance perspective to the commanders.

In addition to unprofessional conduct, officers can have their command stripped for failing to complete a mission, demonstrating poor leadership skills, or having a catastrophic event, such as a ship or plane crash, happen on their watch.

Of the personal misconduct cases reviewed by investigators, eight in the last four years were related to alcohol abuse, including several drunken driving arrests. In the last two years, 13 involved sexual misconduct, including five related to sexual harassment or assault, and two related to computer pornography.

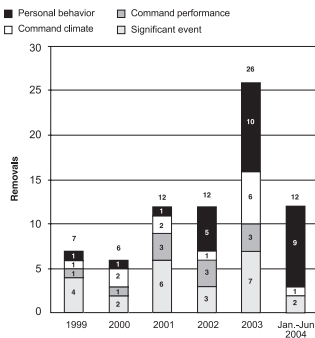
The lead investigator said he found no connection between the detachments and where the commanding officers served, their command history or their level of training.

Nathan said several of the report recommendations have already been put in place, and he expects to see the rest enacted in the near future.

E-mail: Leo Shane at: shane@stripes.osd.mil

A growing problem

The Navy has completed a five-year study of cases where an officer has been "detached for cause." Released Wednesday, the study shows a sharp increase in officers relieved of command, many for personal behavior issues, such as sexual misconduct and alcohol abuse.



Source: U.S. Navy, Naval Inspector General

Stars and Stripes

State offers financial help to military families

BY MICHAEL MELLO

The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The wife of one Rhode Island soldier serving overseas had her heat turned off because she couldn't pay the bill.

Another serviceman returned home needing a small loan before starting a new job.

Military families struggling with these and other expenses, including roof repairs and car pay-

ments, are now eligible for grants and loans from the Military Family Relief Fund.

"Every day we see more and more soldiers [facing] danger," R.I. National Guard Adjutant Gen. Reginald Centracchio said Wednesday, at a Statehouse press conference announcing the fund.

"What they don't need to worry about are their families here" at home.

Lt. Gov. Charles Fogarty said many members of the National

Guard and military reserve units earn less when they are deployed than they do as civilians. When deployments last several months or more, they can create financial hardship for the families left behind, he said.

Rhode Island is one of several states with funds to help these families make ends meet. Fogarty said the fund so far has collected about \$120,000 in donations.

Beginning in January, taxpay-

ers also contribute by checking off a box on income tax forms.

National Guard Lt. Col. Robert Behn said one family has already received a \$1,000 grant and five others are awaiting similar grants or loans.

The Narragansett Lions Club has been one of the biggest contributors, collecting \$65,000 for the fund. The money was raised with the help of an auction and donations from people whose names were put on T-shirts, many of

which were sent to soldiers overseas.

"We feel strongly about supporting the troops," club spokesman Kirk Pickell said.

The fund will be run by Centracchio's office.

To qualify for help, families must meet income restrictions. Since Sept. 11, 2001, 3,500 members of the Rhode Island National Guard have been deployed. That's the most since World War I, when 3,800 were deployed.

Europe dining facilities win awards

BY RICK EMERT

Stars and Stripes

Two Installation Management Agency-Europe food service organizations in Germany were named the best in their respective categories Monday in the Department of the Army Philip A. Connelly Award Program.

The 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, at Hohenfels, won in the large garrison dining facility category, and Battery C, 6-52nd Air Defense Artillery Battalion in Katterbach, won best field kitchen, according to an IMA-Europe release.

Another facility, the 26th Area Support Group's Army Mission Diner in Heidelberg, was a runner-up in the small garrison dining facility category.

The program recognizes the best in Army food service at the battalion, installation, major command and Army levels, according to the Army's food service Web site (www.quartermaster.army.mil/aces).

The awards were named in honor of Connelly, a former president of the International Food Service Executives Association. The association and Department of the Army co-sponsor the awards, which started in March 1968, according to the Web site.

Evaluators visit the dining facilities and rate food preparation, sanitation, customer satisfaction and other areas.

Judges from the association and the U.S. Army Quartermaster Center and School at Fort Lee, Va., select a winner and runner-up for each category based on information from the evaluators, according to the Web site.

Recipients will accept their awards in a ceremony in San Diego in April, according to Michael Beldermann, an IMA-Europe spokesman.

Unlike other award programs that recognize excellence in military career fields, there is no Department of Defense-level of competition for food service excellence, Beldermann said.

Burial service held for retired officer

A burial service was held Wednesday for a retired Army officer who had been residing in Germany.

Carl J. Arseneault, 52, died Monday from colon cancer at the home of his parents, Arthur and William Blazier Arseneault in Knoxville, Tenn. According to an announcement from the funeral home, he had been living in Germany near Ramstein Air Base with his wife of 21 years, Gabriele.

Arseneault retired from the Army in 1985 as a captain, earned a graduate degree and became a college writing instructor. He was buried at Tennessee State Veterans' Cemetery in Knoxville. A memorial Mass was scheduled for Thursday.

Final stages of installing 6th Fleet flagship

The Navy is in the final stages of making the USS Mount Whitney the new flagship of the 6th Fleet, based in Gaeta, Italy.

The Navy announced this week that it has completed official notification of the change with local and national Italian government officials. The official turnover ceremony, in which the Mount Whitney will replace the USS La Salle, will be in late February.

The La Salle will be decommissioned in Norfolk, Va., following the turnover. It has been the fleet flagship since November 1994.

The Mount Whitney most recently served as the command ship for U.S. 2nd Fleet in Norfolk, and will provide command and control capabilities for NATO forces in Europe in addition to 6th Fleet.

From staff reports

IN THE STATES

Snow precedes bitter cold in Midwest

BY KIMBERLY HEFLING
The Associated Press

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — A foot or more of snow was possible in parts of Indiana and Ohio as a storm spanning the nation's mid-section arrived in the region Wednesday, and motorists already were sliding off roads.

Snow was falling from New Mexico, where some schools were closed, to the lower Great Lakes.

The snow marked the leading edge of bitterly cold air flowing southward. Highs only in the teens were forecast Wednesday in the northern Texas Panhandle, where wind chills on Thursday could be as low as 15 below zero, the National Weather Service said.

At the northern extreme of the cold air mass, International Falls, Minn., the temperature fell from 8 below zero at midnight to 20 below by midmorning, the weather service said.

Eight inches of snow had fall-



The U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker *Neah Bay* is framed by ice covered trees along the shore of Lake Erie on Monday. Brisk winds and snow-freezing temperatures are following a snowstorm that could dump up to a foot of snow on parts of northeast Ohio.

en by late morning in the hilly terrain southwestern Indiana, where Evansville recorded only 7 inches all of last winter, and police reported numerous vehicles sliding off slippery roads.

In central Indiana, snow was more than 7 inches deep at Co-

lumbus and county government offices were closed because roads were hazardous.

Through Thursday, snowfall totals could reach a foot in parts of southern Indiana, meteorologists said.

But for western Ohio, fore-

Dad helps deliver baby on snowy N.C. highway

GREENVILLE, N.C. — Jennifer Sneed was packed and ready for the trip to a hospital to have her baby this week, but she wasn't ready for a snowstorm.

Sneed went into labor, and she and her husband, Jerry, headed from their eastern North Carolina town of Washington to a hospital 20 miles to the east in Greenville.

Just after 1 a.m. Monday, Gerry Sneed called Pitt County 911, telling the dispatcher his wife said the baby was coming out and they were still on the snowy highway. "Well, stop. We need you to help deliver the baby, then," the operator said. Gerry Sneed stopped the car right in the middle of the highway. Madison Sneed was born at 1:47 a.m. Monday.

It was on the same road that their 5-year-old son Dereck was killed in a car wreck last year. "My little boy was buried [in] the last snowfall of last season," Jennifer Sneed said. "Madison was born the first snowfall of this season. So we say it's a blessing from God and our little boy that she came when she did."

From wire reports

casts were upgraded because cold air was moving in faster than expected and rain was turning to snow more quickly.

"Some locations will have a hard run at 20 inches," meteorologist Mike Ryan said in Wilmington.

The precipitation was moving toward the east, and rain and snow were possible Thursday from the Gulf of Mexico into New England.

To the west, up to 6 inches of snow was possible in parts of northern Texas.

Supreme Court hears Wash. recount case

The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Lawyers battling over the fate of hundreds of mistakenly rejected ballots in Washington's astonishingly close governor's race made their arguments before the state Supreme Court on Wednesday.

Republican Dino Rossi won the election by 261 votes, then won a machine recount by 42 votes out of 2.9 million ballots cast.

Democrats paid for a hand recount, which currently has Rossi 49 votes ahead of Democrat Christine Gregoire.

But late Tuesday, Paul Berend, state Democratic Party chairman, said preliminary results of the hand recount gave Gregoire an eight-vote edge — and the lead for the first time.

Wednesday morning, the high court considered whether King County — the state's largest and a stronghold for Gregoire — should be allowed to add to the recount 723 ballots that weren't counted

originally because of mistakes by county election workers. State law says county canvassing boards can reconsider votes when there is "an apparent discrepancy or an inconsistency in the returns."

A Pierce County Superior Court judge on Friday granted the state Republican Party's motion for a temporary restraining order to stop King County from counting the newly discovered ballots. King County, the state Democratic Party and the secretary of state appealed that ruling.

Unless the Pierce County order is reversed, Democrats argued, voters will be disenfranchised through no fault of their own.

Republicans countered that the real harm would be if the newly discovered ballots are allowed to be counted so long after the election.

Thomas Ahearne, a lawyer for the secretary of state's office, told justices that state law allows canvassing boards to fix errors caused by election staff.

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Bush meets with NAACP

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Bush met Tuesday at the White House with the outgoing head of the NAACP, the first meeting of his presidency with the nation's oldest civil rights group.

"It was a very frank and a very open dialogue," NAACP President Kweisi Mfume told reporters afterward. "We both have real differences."

White House press secretary Scott McClellan described the

session as "a good discussion about a wide range of issues."

The meeting came about after NAACP President Kweisi Mfume sent Bush a letter on Nov. 2 congratulating him on his re-election and requesting the chance to discuss challenges confronting the nation, said John White, the group's spokesman. Mfume announced Nov. 30 he is stepping down from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People leadership post.

Poll: Most confident about prescription drug safety

BY WILL LESTER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Consumers remain confident in the safety of prescription drugs sold in this country at a time when some popular ones have been linked to health problems, an Associated Press poll found.

They also expressed confidence in the Food and Drug Administration, the federal agency responsible for ensuring drug safety. But some indicated their confidence is limited.

The FDA has come under intense scrutiny because of health risks linked to the use of Vioxx, which has been withdrawn from the market; Celebrex; and now Aleve, which is sold over the counter.

Just over eight in 10 said they have confidence in the general safety of prescription drugs in this country, the poll conducted for the AP by Ipsos-Public Affairs found. Almost that many said they have confidence in the FDA.

Only about one-third said they were "very confident" about the safety of prescription drugs in the United States and half said they were "somewhat confident." About one-fourth in the poll said they were "very confident" in the FDA's ability to ensure the safety of prescription drugs, with about half saying they were "somewhat confident."

Retiree Gabrielle Purvis said the barrage of news about possible drug problems is dizzying.

"You get so much information after Vioxx was pulled from the market," said Purvis, who lives in Lottsburg, Va., near the Chesapeake Bay. "It's crazy. We end up with too much information that hasn't been properly analyzed."

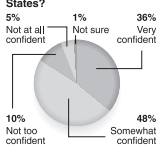
The poll was taken this past weekend after questions were raised last week about Celebrex, a pain reliever more than two months after Vioxx was pulled from the market. But it was taken before a study raised a possible heart attack-stroke link with naproxen, which is sold over the counter as Aleve.

Among the recent problems: ■ The popular arthritis drug

AP-IPPOS POLL Confident about safety of U.S. medications

Most Americans remain at least somewhat confident in the safety of prescription drugs sold in the United States despite recent problems, according to a poll.

Overall, how confident are you in the safety of prescription drugs sold in the United States?



NOTE: The poll included 1,002 adults and was taken Dec. 17-19; it has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

SOURCE: Ipsos-Public Affairs for AP

Vioxx was pulled from the market by manufacturer Merck on Sept. 30 because of evidence it increased the risk of heart attack and strokes.

■ Last week, another popular pain reliever, Celebrex, was found to increase the risk of heart attack when taken in high doses. Its maker, Pfizer, has suspended advertising, but the drug is still on the market.

■ Officials at the National Institutes of Health on Monday halted a study of naproxen, an over-the-counter pain reliever commonly sold under the brand name Aleve, because of possible links to heart attacks and strokes. These reports — and questions about other prescription drugs in recent years — have led critics of the FDA to claim the agency approves drugs too quickly, doesn't follow up effectively on possible health effects and is too close to drug companies.

In another high profile case, the FDA was criticized for not acting quickly enough to issue warnings that anti-depressant use by children could increase suicidal thoughts and behavior.

White House chief of staff Andy Card defended the FDA last weekend, saying it does "a spectacular job."

Some people say they've grown suspicious of the drug approval process, however.

"Corporate people are cutting corners for the profit," said Mill Powell, a manufacturing engineer from Houston.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., said Tuesday that he is working with Republicans on legislation that would give the FDA more authority and money to monitor drugs after approval. "Too many American lives have been unnecessarily put at risk," he said.

Many consumers have a strong personal interest in prescription drug safety, given that three-fourths of those polled said they had taken a prescription drug in the last year.

Of those prescription drug users, just over six in 10 said they have talked with a doctor about possible side effects of a new prescription drug. Most in the poll, 85 percent, said they read at least some of the information in the drug pamphlets.

Only one in six people who took prescription drugs of any kind in the last year, 14 percent, said they have asked their doctor or pharmacist to re-examine the drugs they were taking since Vioxx was taken off the market and drugs have been questioned.

Among those who used Vioxx, Celebrex or Bextra — all painkillers known as cox-2 inhibitors — one-third have asked their doctor or pharmacist to reassess the prescription drugs they are taking.

The AP-Ipsos poll of 1,002 adults was taken Dec. 17-19 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points, slightly higher for the 773 prescription drug users polled.



Medical marijuana user Diane Monson, right, talks about how she will fight the Department of Motor Vehicles to prevent the agency from suspending her driving privileges, on Tuesday during a news conference in Sacramento, Calif. At left is Monson's attorney, David Michael.

Medical marijuana user fights California DMV over driver's license test

BY BRIAN MELLEY
The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Officials Tuesday abruptly postponed a driver's license test for a medical marijuana user with a case before the U.S. Supreme Court after her lawyer claimed she was being unfairly targeted for review.

Diane Monson, 47, who uses marijuana to relieve back pain, was notified by the Department of Motor Vehicles earlier this month that she needed to appear at a re-examination hearing Thursday — or lose her license.

Such hearings are held routinely for drivers involved in serious crashes or who have been cited for driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol at least three times over three years.

Monson said with the exception of a speeding ticket 15 years ago, she had a spotless record. The DMV notice did not say why she was selected for re-examination.

"I still feel very strongly that I've done nothing whatsoever to warrant this investigation," Monson said after being notified the hearing was scrapped.

Even a spokesman for Attorney General Bill Lockyer seemed puzzled

zled a DMV hearing was required in Monson's case.

"Quite frankly, I find it strange," spokesman Nathan Barankin said.

DMV brass put the hearing on hold and launched a "top to bottom" internal review after Monson and her lawyer delivered a cease-and-desist notice to agency headquarters, said spokesman Bill Branch.

"So far as top-level DMV officials can recall, we are not aware of any other cases involving medicinal marijuana," Branch said. Monson had just passed an eye exam to renew her license when she was notified of the hearing; it arrived shortly after her medical marijuana case was heard by the nation's high court.

Monson is a plaintiff in a case that will determine whether federal law enforcement agents can seize pot grown by users in states where it can be legally prescribed as medicine.

California law allows people to grow, smoke or obtain marijuana for medical needs with a doctor's recommendation. Other states with such laws are Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont and Washington.

U.S. cites safety concerns about medicine imports

BY MARK SHERMAN
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Consumers would see little savings from a government-sanctioned system of prescription drug imports from Canada, the Bush administration says.

But a growing number of consumers already get their drugs north of the border, where prices on brand-name medicines are often one-third less, and aren't likely to change their ways, despite a report Tuesday from the administration depicting safety concerns with imported medicines.

Advocates for opening the borders to prescription drugs said the report ignores the reality. "Call 1,000 seniors in Minnesota who currently get their drugs from Canada, I bet you won't find a single one who'd say to

morrow morning, 'You know, Hazel, I think I'd better quit buying from Canada,'" Rep. Gil Gurfinkel, R-Min., said.

Ten million illegal shipments of prescription drugs worth \$1.4 billion entered the United States in 2003, about half of them from Canada, the report said. Authorities have not prosecuted individuals who buy drugs abroad and inspectors are overwhelmed by the sheer number of packages.

Drug imports represent less than 1 percent of U.S. drug spending, but the number is five times greater than it was in 2001, the report said. A growing number of cities and states are helping employees and retirees buy drugs from Canada, over the objection of the Food and Drug Administration.

Lawmakers in both parties said they are convinced majorities in both houses of Congress support drug imports because of con-

sumer complaints about fast-rising drug prices. Gurfinkel and others said they would renew their push for importation legislation next year, despite opposition from Republican congressional leaders and the administration.

Several bills in the Senate would have permitted imports from Canada, where brand-name medicines cost one-third or more less.

Legislation passed the House last year, but Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., a Senate, refused to allow a vote in the Senate.

Medicare chief Mark McClellan, a member of the task force that produced the report, said the bill has been introduced satisfies the administration's safety concerns.

Medicare's prescription drug benefit be-

gins in 2006, and the administration is betting that older and sicker people, who consume most prescription medicine, will see sufficient savings to depress the drive for cheaper drugs from abroad. The importation report was part of last year's Medicare law.

The report severely limited the circumstances in which drug imports could be made. Individual drug shipments through the mail and package services should not be made legal at all, the report said.

Commercial importation from Canada, using licensed wholesalers, could be considered, the report said. But the savings would be small because taxpayers would have to spend several hundred million dollars to increase substantially the regulation of drug manufacturers and distributors, the report said. Middlemen also would skim off most of the savings, it said.

2 Fannie Mae executives forced out

Shake-up comes as mortgage giant struggles with accounting scandal

BY MARTIN CRUTSINGER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Fannie Mae, the nation's second-largest financial institution, forced out two top executives as it struggles to deal with an accounting scandal which will likely force it to wipe out \$9 billion in profits over the past four years.

Fannie Mae chief executive Franklin Raines and J. Timothy Howard, the company's chief financial officer, stepped down Tuesday after lengthy negotiations between the Fannie Mae board and the company's chief government regulator, the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight, or OFHEO.

In a statement issued late Tuesday night, Raines said he had decided to leave to fulfill a pledge he made during congressional testimony in October that he would take the blame if serious accounting problems were found at the company.

"By my early retirement, I have held myself accountable," Raines said.

A Fannie Mae statement announced that Howard had also resigned.

The company said it had hired an executive search firm to find replacements for the two men.



Fannie Mae Chairman and CEO Franklin Raines, left, and J. Timothy Howard, the company's executive vice president and chief financial officer, prepare to testify in October before the House Financial Services Committee on Capitol Hill.

The management shake-up was having a beneficial impact on the company's stock price as investors responded to signs that the Fannie Mae board was moving aggressively to deal with the company's problems. Fannie Mae stock rose \$2.26, or 3.2 percent, to \$72.61 in midmorning Wednesday.

Industry and congressional sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Fannie Mae's

board had been pressured by OFHEO during tense negotiations over the past several days to demand the resignations of both Raines and Howard.

OFHEO Director Armando Falcon Jr. said in a statement that his agency had determined that Fannie Mae, the biggest player in the nation's \$5 trillion mortgage market, had been left "significantly undercapitalized" because of its accounting problems.

A review by the Securities and Exchange Commission determined last week that Fannie Mae must restate earnings back to 2001 because it violated accounting rules for derivatives — financial instruments used to hedge against interest-rate swings — and for some prepaid loans.

That restatement of earnings is likely to wipe out \$9 billion — or about one-third — of Fannie Mae's profits — since 2001.

Fannie Mae, long a Wall Street darling, is the biggest buyer and guarantor of home mortgage loans in the United States and is the country's second-largest financial institution behind Citigroup Inc.

In a statement, Rep. Richard Baker, R-La., the chairman of a House Financial Services subcommittee that oversees Fannie Mae, said: "Given the unbelievable statements Fannie executives made at our last hearing, this action was entirely necessary."

The problems at Fannie Mae were similar to accounting difficulties encountered by its smaller competitor, Freddie Mac, which emerged from its own accounting scandal and executive shake-up after disclosing in June 2003 that it misstated earnings by \$5 billion.

Judge in AOL spam case rejects plea

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — A federal judge refused to accept a guilty plea Tuesday from a former America Online software engineer accused of stealing 92 million e-mail addresses and selling them to spammers.

Judge Alvin Hellerstein of Manhattan federal court said he was not convinced Jason Smathers, 24, had actually committed a crime under new federal "can-spam" legislation that took effect earlier this year.

Smathers, of Harpers Ferry, W.Va., planned to enter guilty pleas to charges of conspiracy and interstate transportation of stolen property. But the judge turned him away and scheduled another hearing for January.

Under a plea deal, Smathers faced a potential prison term of 18 months to two years, plus fines.

The judge said it was not clear that Smathers had deceived anyone — a requirement of the law.

Federal prosecutor David Siegel urged the judge to accept Smathers' guilty plea, saying "billions and billions of unsolicited e-mails" had been sent to "people like Your Honor" because of Smathers' conduct.

Hellerstein set a new hearing date for Jan. 28.

Slain pregnant woman laid to rest in Missouri

The Associated Press

MARYVILLE, Mo. — Crying and exchanging hugs, mourners said goodbye to a mother-to-be who was strangled and whose baby was cut from her womb.

Hundreds gathered in this small northwestern Missouri town for the service, the crowd filling the funeral home.

"I don't know what to say," the Rev. Harold Hamon told mourners Tuesday. "This is one of those times where you can't figure it out at all and words fail."

Bobbie Jo Stinnett, 23, was eight months pregnant when her mother found her in a pool of blood in her Skidmore home Thursday, the baby she was carrying missing.

Lisa M. Montgomery, 36, of Melton, Kan., said Stinnett knew from dog breeding and shows — has been charged with kidnapping resulting in death.

The child, named Victoria Jo Stinnett, spent the weekend in a hospital before going home Monday afternoon with her father and another relative.

Tanker truck crashes, explodes near Pentagon

The Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. — A fuel tanker truck crashed near the Pentagon early Wednesday causing multiple explosions and temporarily shutting down a portion of the roadway.

Arlington County authorities said the driver was killed in the accident, but Virginia State Police, who are heading the investigation, would not officially confirm the fatality.

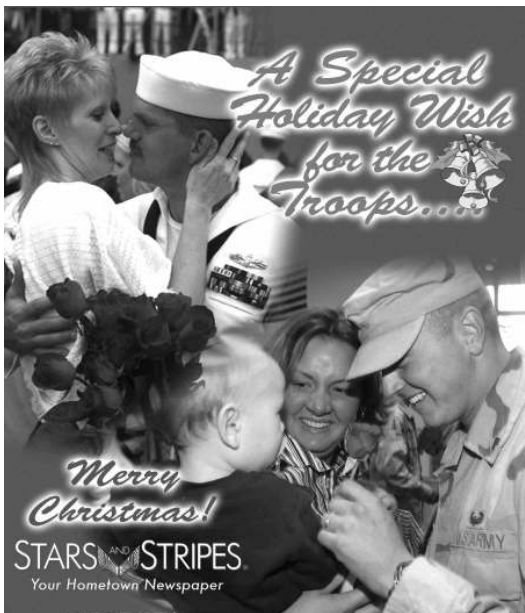
"You can't even recognize it anymore — it's basically a pile of

steel," Arlington County Chief Fire Marshal Carol Saulnier said of the truck's condition.

The accident happened around 3:40 a.m. on the Washington Boulevard exit ramp off Interstate 395. Police believe the truck driver lost control as he was entering the ramp and hit a guardrail. The vehicle then rolled over and caught fire.

"We had flames probably about 50 feet in the air," said Captain Tom Polera, Arlington County Assistant Fire Marshal.

Police said there is no link with terrorism.



Immigration law causes many to scramble

BY CAROLYN THOMPSON

The Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Refugee shelters on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border are overflowing with people scrambling to apply for asylum before a new immigration law takes effect Dec. 29.

Beginning next Wednesday, immigrants seeking asylum in the United States or Canada will have to apply to whichever country they arrived in first. Refugees who first travel to the United States, before attempting to enter Canada, will be turned away.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service

Asylum seekers travel to Canada before Safe Third Country agreement takes effect

es said the so-called Safe Third Country agreement between the United States and Canada is meant to cut red tape for asylum seekers. Critics predict it will lead more immigrants to try to illegally cross the U.S. border.

The Vive La Casa shelter in Buffalo, a stopping point for refugees heading north, was filled to capacity Tuesday and directing people to hotels while working to set up appointments for clients with Canadian immigration officials.

"We are struggling to manage the numbers," said executive director Ron Smith, who said the situation was made more difficult by unanswered questions about how the agreement will be implemented.

The fear is that as many as 700 other refugees now in Buffalo will show up at the Peace Bridge without an appointment before the deadline and become stranded.

Canadian immigration has been processing 260 applicants a week at the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie — about double the

usual number — for the last two weeks, said Brian Hutchings, director of social assistance for the Regional Municipality of Niagara. An additional 160 people have appointments before Dec. 29, he said.

With existing shelters already full, the Niagara Region recently transformed a vacant Welland, Ontario, nursing home into temporary housing for 350 people. But "we will be maxed out at that center in the next three days," Hutchings said.

Immigrant families were being asked to take refugees into their homes.

About half of refugees in the Niagara region are from Colombia, while others come from African nations and the Middle East, officials said.

Groups plan to protest Bush's inauguration

BY EMILY FREDRIX

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Groups targeting President Bush's economic agenda, the legitimacy of his election and the war in Iraq plan a week of events to counter his inauguration Jan. 20.

"Our intention is to show President Bush and the world our movement is energized, mobilized and determined to fight back," said Gael Murphy, of the activist group Code Pink.

Inauguration week will feature rallies, marches and demonstrations with the focus on peaceful, family-friendly gatherings, said organizer Shahid Buttar. Hundreds of groups throughout the country will participate, Buttar said, including Mobilization for Global Justice and the Committee to ReDefeat the President, a PAC that uses Bush's presidency as illegitimately won.

The groups have received permits for parks around the city, Buttar said, but they are still waiting for clearance to march along the Inaugural Parade route. More details will be released once all permits have been secured, said David Lytel, founder of Redefeat Bush.

Bush, who will be in a security area known as the "Red Zone," will be surrounded by blue, the color assigned to Democratic-voting states, Lytel said.

"What I expect is more people will be here to protest Bush's inauguration than to inaugurate him," Lytel said.

Lytel said his group will film events on Inauguration Day and release a documentary online that evening. They also plan a protest near the Capitol on Jan. 6, the day Congress will certify the electoral votes and officially declare Bush the winner.



David Lytel, founder of RedefeatBush.com, speaks at a news conference held by counter-inaugural organizers to unite the resistance against the second Bush administration in Washington, Tuesday.

Fisherman rescue

BOSTON — The lifeboat bobbed like "a giant balloon" on the frigid water, the shirtless man aboard clinging fast, paddling when he could, then scrambling back on board when high seas tossed him aside.

At least two times, Tony Alvarez, captain of the Diane Marie, watched Pedro Furtado plunge into the 47-degree water before fighting his way back onto the raft. Somewhere behind them, his boat, the Northern Edge, had capsized and was sinking.

Furtado was eventually pulled aboard Alvarez's boat. He was the only crewmember known to have survived the accident on the Northern Edge in the bitter cold off Nantucket on Monday.

Furtado, speaking by cellular phone Tuesday, also from the Diane Marie, said the Northern Edge capsized as it dredged for one last batch of scallops during a planned seven-day trip that began last Thursday. He told The Standard-Times of West Bedford that he managed to make it to the raft because he took off his boots and most of his clothes underwater.

Furtado said he was shaken by the ordeal.

FAA's controller plan

WASHINGTON — The Federal Aviation Administration announced a plan to hire 12,500 air traffic controllers and let some existing workers stay on the job longer than their mandatory retirement age to offset a tidal wave of looming retirements.

The plan includes FAA Administrator Marion Blakey also calls for speeding up training to get controllers on the job faster and reducing the work force at airports with less air traffic.

The genesis for the moves can be traced to 1981, when President Ronald Reagan fired more than 10,000 controllers and hired replacements. Nearly three-quarters of those workers will be eligible to retire in the next 10 years.

The plan includes 435 controllers next year for whom Congress already has budgeted. In 2006, 1,249 more will be added, and varying numbers will be hired in subsequent years through 2014.

When hiring is completed, the FAA will have about 16,200 controllers, about 1,500 more than now, to accommodate an expected increase in air traffic.

From The Associated Press

Study disputes connection between death, holidays

BY LINDSEY TANNER

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Death takes no holiday, according to a study that challenges the widely held notion that dying people can somehow hold on until after Christmas or other important events in their lives.

Donn Young, a biostatistician at Ohio State University's Comprehensive Cancer Center who studied more than 300,000 cancer patients, said the supposed phenomenon is mostly based on wishful thinking and selective memories.

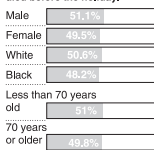
"The mind does play a role in illness," he said. "But the idea that death is something that an individual patient can control by sheer force of will — just from looking at the data, this doesn't appear to be so."

Some doctors and nurses who work with gravely ill people are not convinced by the findings, arguing that the statistics do not tell the human side of the story.

Postponing death

A review of death certificates in Ohio from 1989 to 2000 failed to show that dying people can intentionally postpone death to survive a significant event.

Of those dying in the weeks before and after Christmas, half died before the holiday.



SOURCE: Journal of the American Medical Association

Young and statistician Erin Had looked at Ohio death certificates for people who died of cancer from 1989 to 2000 and analyzed how many deaths occurred

before and after three dates — Christmas, Thanksgiving and the person's birthday.

"If there was an effect, you'd see a dip before — and an increase after," Young said. But there was no dip, and no significant difference in the proportion of cancer patients dying before an event and those dying after.

The study was published in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association.

"I can't believe they'd put this out right before Christmas," said Dr. Daniel Lofstein, a specialist in geriatric psychiatry at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. "It's like walking around and telling people there's no Santa Claus."

Lofstein said the study does not take into account individual situations and fails to consider that events other than holidays might be more important for some dying patients.

"We have all had the experience of watching a patient wanting to be there for their daughter's wedding day, a grandfather wanting to be there for the grandson's bar mitzvah or a Communion."

Lofstein said, "I don't think we should ever discount the power of hope and the power of these emotional events to move patients."

Other studies supporting the phenomenon include University of California at San Diego sociologist David Phillips' research showing declines in death rates among Jewish men before Passover and among elderly Chinese women before the Harvest Moon Festival.

Young said it is possible that the numbers of people wanting to hang on were evenly balanced by those wishing to die before the event. But he doubts it.

"I just don't think that a patient wishes to die 'early' and to get it over with" — particularly when we seem to put an emphasis on our courageous "fight" against cancer," he said.

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'Baby' galaxies found

PASADENA, Calif. — An orbiting NASA telescope that scans the heavens has found evidence of massive "baby" galaxies that runs counter to a belief that only small new galaxies are being formed by the aging universe.

The findings released Tuesday come from the Galaxy Evolution Explorer, a mission led by the California Institute of Technology that was launched into Earth orbit in 2003 to study 10 billion years of the evolution of galaxies.

The researchers said the discoveries will allow scientists to see what the Milky Way might have looked like when it was young.

Lost skiers found

KILLINGTON, Vt. — Four Pennsylvania men who spent nearly 30 hours in the woods after getting lost outside the boundaries at Killington Resort were rescued after a helicopter spotted their campfire.

The men, two skiers and two snowboarders from Perkaskie, Pa., survived on gun, breath mints and snow melted over a fire they built with a Ziploc lighter and some wet sticks of wood.

Michael Syer, Jared Raytek and Thomas Arnold, all 23, and Jared Rush, 22, were treated at Rutland Regional Medical Center.

Blade found in man's shoe

HONOLULU — A man was arrested Tuesday at Honolulu International Airport after a box cutter blade was found hidden in one of his shoes.

The unidentified 33-year-old man from Virginia was traveling with his wife and four children to Kauai, officials said. He was stopped at a security checkpoint when an X-ray machine detected a metal object in the shoe, they said.

From The Associated Press

Is Scott Peterson a psychopath?

Experts explore why he chose murder over divorce

BY BRIAN SKOLOFF

The Associated Press

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. — Of all the questions surrounding the murder case against a man convicted of killing his pregnant wife, the one that seemed to be running through practically everyone's mind was this: If he was so unhappy in his marriage, why didn't he just get a divorce?

Experts on the criminal mind say the answer may lie in what lurked beneath Scott Peterson's charming veneer — a psychopathic personality.

"When you say you're going to get a divorce, everyone knows that it's a long, tedious process. The psychopath wants the short-term solution," said San Diego forensic psychologist Reid Moley.

Peterson, 32, was convicted earlier this month of murdering his eight-months-pregnant wife, Laci, and the fetus she was carrying, and the jury decided he deserves the death penalty.

Criminal psychologists say Peterson appeared to be a master manipulator who lacked the capacity to feel remorse or consider consequences — some of the same psychopathic characteristics exhibited by serial killers Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy.

Psychopsychs "tend to can people very well and they wear false faces," said former FBI profiler Robert Ressler. "They tend to be able to fool everyone from their



Scott Peterson listens to Judge Alfred A. Delucchi in a Redwood City, Calif., courtroom, in July. Probably the biggest question coming out of Peterson's trial is, why did he kill his wife when he could have gotten a divorce? The answer may lie in a psychopathic personality.

families or their friends to society, schools, their community."

At Peterson's trial, prosecutors portrayed him as a callous liar who continued

to carry on an extramarital affair even as police searched for his wife. They said he killed her to escape marriage and impending fatherhood for the freeheeling single life.

Whether Laci's pregnancy was the catalyst for Peterson's plan may never be known. But experts said pregnancy can lead to seismic changes within a relationship.

Pregnancy "represents commitment, fatherhood, another dependent, a lifelong bond ... and all of those things are strongly despised by the psychopath," Moley said.

Peterson's case was made all the more perplexing by the lack of signs that the couple's marriage was in trouble. Although Peterson had cheated on Laci at least three times, according to defense attorney Mark Geragos, he appeared to family and friends to be a doting husband and father-to-be after Laci became pregnant.

Those closest to the couple said they never suspected there was a monster inside.

Heather Richardson, the maid of honor at the Petersons' wedding, is still hoping for a plausible explanation to emerge. Perhaps, she said, Peterson suffers from a disorder that has yet to be revealed.

"It would be at least comforting. Then I would realize that the person I knew and loved dearly was there. He was that person and the other person, too," Richardson said. "So at least part of him was not a lie."

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From left, Mary Vandenbosch, her daughter, Emelissa, 6, and Isabel Szatkowski, 8, light candles Tuesday in remembrance of homeless people who died in Portland, Maine.

AP



Homeless remembered

Day honors those who died living on the street

BY JAYMES SONG

The Associated Press

HONOLULU — Since he went from home remodeler to homeless person two years ago, Tim Cook has been robbed eight times, been beaten up five times and suf-

fered four staph infections.

"It's been utter, complete despair," said Cook, 50. "You're completely at the mercy of other people."

Five of Cook's friends have died homeless, including one who had a stroke two weeks ago. Their

stories and cries, though, are rare-ly heard.

For the first time, Honolulu joined cities across the country Tuesday in remembering the thousands who died homeless in 2004. A record 125 cities — 25 more than last year — are holding events this week to observe National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day.

"The memorial day is a way to make sure no one's life goes unnoticed," said Michael Stoops of the Washington-based National Coalition of Homeless.

The homeless coalition estimates there are more than 3.5 million homeless Americans nationwide. An estimated 3,000 died last year, and the homeless coalition expects that figure to rise this year.

The No. 1 cause of death was natural causes, followed by homicide, suicide and hypothermia, Stoops said.

Stoops began the annual remembrance in 1990, choosing Dec. 21, the first day of winter and the longest night of the year.

"Americans are good and decent people. Nobody wants people to live or die homeless. I think we've just become accustomed to it," he said.

In Philadelphia, where temperatures hovered near freezing, homeless advocates held a candlelight ceremony outside City Hall to remember 33 homeless people who died.

"They died from the apathy and the violence and the horrendous conditions that poverty put them in," said Sister Mary Scullion, executive director of the homeless advocacy group Project HOME.

There are about 6,000 homeless people in Hawaii, and about 30 die every year in Honolulu alone, according to the Affordable Housing and Homeless Alliance.



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U.S. residents able to view space station

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — If the weather cooperates, the International Space Station should be visible at various times during the holidays from the continental United States, NASA said Tuesday.

On Christmas morning, the orbiting station should be visible during the pre-dawn hours, NASA said. That day, a Russian cargo ship carrying food and supplies is scheduled to dock with the station.

The space station will appear as a steady white pinpoint of light as it moves across the sky, NASA said, and can be seen by the naked eye or with binoculars.

Since the station will fly by at five miles a second, it may be visible only for a minute or less, the space agency said.

The 200-ton station should be visible on various days between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day from the continental United States. To see when the station is visible, go to: <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/iss sightings>

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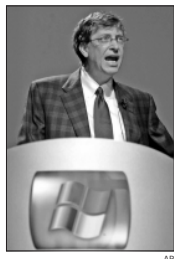
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IN THE WORLD



A European Union court ruled Wednesday that Bill Gates and Microsoft must reveal some trade secrets to competitors and produce a version of Windows stripped of its digital Media Player program.

EU orders Microsoft to divulge secrets

BY RAF CASERT

The Associated Press

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The European Union struck at the commercial backbone of Microsoft's global software empire on Wednesday — forcing the company for the first time to strip its Windows platform of a popular feature to give competitors a better shot at success.

An EU court ruled that Microsoft Corp. must immediately divulge some trade secrets to competitors and produce a version of its flagship Windows operating system without the program that plays music and video.

The 91-page ruling thwarts Microsoft's attempt to delay, pending appeal, implementation of the EU's landmark antitrust decision in March that demanded changes in the software giant's business practices.

The company said it would start shipping Windows without its digital Media Player within weeks so it will be on sale as an alternative to the full Windows program by February.

Microsoft lamented the fact it was forced to release "a degraded version" of Windows. "It will be harmful to consumers and competition and undermines the technology integration that has been the backbone of the information technology revolution over the past three decades," the company said.

The implications for Microsoft are sizable since software that plays media files is increasingly in demand as more consumers get broadband connections to the Internet and use their PCs as entertainment centers.

There also is the question of precisely what computer code Microsoft will share with competitors so that those companies' programs work better on networks run by Microsoft server software.

Tanzanian acquitted in '98 bombing

Judge finds no proof of involvement in deadly attack on U.S. Embassy

BY SUKHDEV CHHATBAR

The Associated Press

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania — A High Court judge on Wednesday found a Tanzanian businessman innocent of conspiracy to commit murder in the 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in the East African nation.

Judge Emiliano Mushi ordered the immediate release of Rashid Saleh Hemed, 34, who was charged in connection with the terror attack that killed 12 people and was blamed on Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network. A nearly simultaneous blast at the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, the capital of neighboring Kenya, killed 219 people, including 12 Americans.

"You cannot convict someone with doubtful evidence," Mushi told the court, after declaring that prosecutors failed to prove beyond doubt that Hemed was involved in the plot to bomb the embassy.

Prosecutors said that they would not appeal the ruling.

"I am not satisfied with the judgment because I knew I was not guilty right from the beginning," Hemed said while walking out of the court.

Hemed was a car parts dealer, was the first person charged in connection with the Aug. 7, 1998, attacks in Tanzania and Kenya. His trial began in 2000.

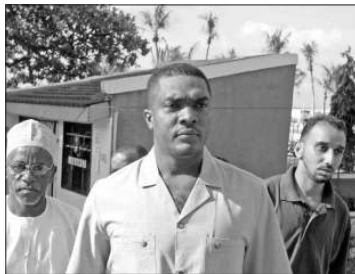
In 2001, four men were convicted in New York of conspiracy to carry out the bombings and sentenced to life in prison. In Kenya, three men are on trial for allegedly taking part in a series of al-Qaida attacks, including the U.S. Embassy bombing.

Hemed initially was charged with 11 counts of murder in September 1998, but the charges were later reduced to conspiracy to commit murder. One person died from injuries after the charges were brought. Hemed pleaded innocent to the charges.

In February, three court assessors declared Hemed innocent, but under Tanzanian law, the presiding judge makes the final ruling.

The prosecution called 18 witnesses during the trial, including three FBI agents who testified last month that on Hemed's clothes they found traces of bomb-making chemicals similar to those used in the embassy bombing.

But defense attorneys argued that Hemed's clothes were mixed with those belonging to other people, including those belonging to Ahmed Khalaf Ghalilani, a Tanzanian captured in Pakistan on June 13, 1998, and released after a shootout in the eastern city of Gujrat. Ghalilani was indicted by a New York court in December 1998 for his role in the attack.



Tanzanian national Rashid Saleh Hemed, center, accompanied with his relatives, Kassim Juma Abdallah, left, and Nazir V. Mohammed, arrives at the Tanzanian High Court in Dar es Salaam on Wednesday.

U.S. Consulate in Indonesia closed

The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — The U.S. Embassy said Wednesday that its consulate in the Indonesian city of Surabaya would be closed for the rest of the year due to security concerns and staff shortages.

On Saturday, the U.S. State Department warned that Islamic terrorists were planning more attacks against Western targets in Indonesia over Christmas and New Year. It reiterated advice to its citizens not to travel to the country.

The state department's advisory followed similar warnings by foreign governments earlier this week that militants belonging to the al-Qaida-linked Jemaah Islamiyah terror group were plotting more bombings.

Blair calls for conference with Palestinians

BY LARA SUKHITIAN

The Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank — British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Wednesday proposed holding a one-day conference in March to help reform and strengthen the Palestinian Authority, billing it as a step toward reviving peace talks stalled by Israeli-Palestinian fighting.

Interim Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said he welcomed the idea of the conference, though the Palestinians initially hoped

for a broader agenda, including key disputes with Israel over Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees and the borders of a Palestinian state.

Blair told a joint news conference with Abbas that the focus of the London gathering would be narrower — focusing on Palestinian administrative, economic and security reform. He said "final status issues" would have to be left to a later time.

Blair said he hoped the conference would serve as a bridge back to the "road map," the

three-stage peace plan that is to culminate in Palestinian statehood.

"My purpose is to give help to the Palestinian Authority and its people so that we can get back into the road map negotiations toward the two-state solution and the viable Palestinians state at the end of it," Blair said.

The international community long has pushed for Palestinian reform, but made no inroads while Arafat was alive. Abbas has promised to make changes, including streamlining the un-

wieldy security services.

The London meeting had been talked about for weeks, but Wednesday marked the first time Blair spoke of it in public. Israel has said it supported the gathering but would not attend.

Abbas, who is running to replace Arafat in Jan. 9 elections, said the Palestinians are eager to resume talks with Israel. "We are very keen and very concerned about catching up on the lost time," he said, referring to the deadlock during more than four years of fighting.

Russia successfully tests intercontinental missile

The Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia successfully test-fired a heavy intercontinental ballistic missile on Wednesday in a launch intended to extend the lifetime of aging Soviet-built weapons.

It was the first time that an RS-20V Voevoda, which NATO identifies as the SS-18 Satan, had been fired from its combat positions in Russia since the 1991 Soviet collapse. Previously, such missiles had been launched from the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan.

The missile, which was launched from a silo in the Orenburg region in the southern

Ural Mountains, hit a designated target on a testing ground on the Far East Kamchatka Peninsula, more than 3,750 miles away.

"The main result of the launch was the confirmation of the technical characteristics of the missiles, which have no analogues in the world," Russia's Strategic Missile Forces said in a statement. It added that the missile had been on combat duty for 16 years before the launch.

The Russian strategic forces have conducted regular test launches of Soviet-built ballistic missiles to check their readiness. The post-Soviet funding shortage has left the military struggling to extend the lifetime of Sovi-

et-built missiles, since the government lacks the funds to quickly replace them with new weapons.

Military officials have said that Russia would keep its arsenal of about 150 SS-18s for another 10 to 15 years, even though the missiles already were past their designated lifetime and were to be scrapped this decade under earlier plans.

The heavy missile, capable of slamming 10 individually guided nuclear warheads at targets more than 6,800 miles away, is the heaviest weapon in Russia's inventory. The SS-18 and other multi-warhead missile, the SS-19, have formed the core of the Russian strategic forces since Soviet times.

Bosnia fugitives may turn selves in

BY IRENA GAJIC
The Associated Press

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia-Herzegovina — The Bosnian Serb Interior Minister said Wednesday that the government was negotiating the surrender of war crimes suspects wanted by the U.N. tribunal with the fugitive's families.

Interior Minister Darko Matijasevic said the suspects appeared to be hiding outside the government's jurisdiction, but said there were signs that fugitives might turn themselves in.

"There are indications that there is interest in voluntary surrender," Matijasevic told reporters.

"The Interior Ministry is actively negotiating with the families of the suspects to present them the benefits and guarantees the government ... is offering," he said.

He did not specify who his ministry was negotiating with or how far the negotiations went.

The government offered earlier this month to make monthly payments to fugitives for the duration of their trial and possible prison terms — and their families — if suspects surrendered before the year's end.

Family members also have been offered two free trips a year to The Hague, Netherlands, where the court is based.

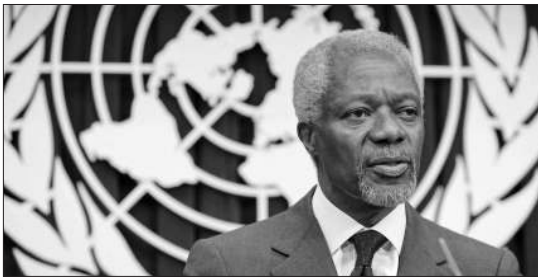
The Bosnian Serbs face mounting international pressure to capture and hand over war crimes suspects wanted for their roles in the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

The country is divided into two republics under the peace agreement that ended Bosnia's war. The agreement requires all sides in the 1992-95 conflict hand over suspects wanted by the tribunal.

However, the Bosnian Serbs are the only ones who have failed to deliver anyone wanted by The Hague.

Bosnia's two most-wanted fugitives are Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic and his top general, Ratko Mladic.

Both were indicted nine years ago by the U.N. war crimes tribunal and face charges of genocide and crimes against humanity.



U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan addresses the media Tuesday in a year-end briefing at U.N. Headquarters in New York. Calling 2004 a "horrible year," he hoped for better relations with the United States in 2005.

Annan hopeful for U.N. reconciliation with U.S.

BY EDITHE M. LEDERER
The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — After a trying year punctuated by calls for his resignation by U.S. lawmakers, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the United States and the United Nations have to find a way to the put their disputes behind them and move ahead with plans to reform the world body and meet poverty reduction goals.

At a year-end news conference Tuesday, Annan said he had no intentions of stepping down over allegations of corruption in the Iraqi oil-for-food program, which have "cast a shadow" over the United Nations and especially over its relations with Washington.

"The United Nations and the United States needs the United States," the secretary-general said.

"And we need to find a way of working together."

"The current criticisms and the attacks have not been helpful for the relationship, regardless of which quarter it comes from, and we need to find a way of putting those kinds of acrimonious discussions behind us and move on," he added.

Relieved at the end of a "horrible year," the secretary-general said he had "the confidence and support" of the 191 U.N. member states and expressed hope the oil-for-food investigation led by former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker will "help clear the air."

Annan refused to back the view of his son, Koyo, who said in a statement to CNN last week that the oil-for-food attacks were "a witchhunt from day one as part of a broader Republican political agenda" in the United States. Koyo Annan is being investigated by Volcker because he worked in Africa for a company that had an

oil-for-food contract, but he denies any involvement.

He refused to accept any personal responsibility until the Volcker investigation is completed in mid-2005, but said, "When you run this sort of operation it is inevitable that there may be some mistakes and things that could have been done better."

Annan said the allegations have overshadowed the relief that the oil-for-food program brought to millions of Iraqis. Launched in December 1996, it allowed Saddam Hussein's regime to sell unlimited quantities of oil provided the money went primarily to buy food, medicine and humanitarian goods and pay reparations to victims of the 1991 Gulf War.

A report in October by top U.S. arms inspector Charles Duelfer said Saddam was able to "subvert" the \$60 billion program to generate an estimated \$1.7 billion in revenue outside U.N. control from 1997 to 2003.

Child sex slaves

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The European Union's new anti-crime commissioner said Wednesday the bloc would step up the fight against human trafficking gangs, which he warned were increasingly targeting children to be sold into sexual slavery.

EU Justice and Security Commissioner Franco Frattini said hundreds of thousands of people had fallen victim to human traffickers in Europe.

"Unfortunately, trafficking in human beings is a low-risk and high-profit enterprise for organized crime," Frattini told a news conference. "Torture, physical and psychological abuse are commonly used to break the victims' resistance to prostitution."

He said most victims were women between 18 and 30, but warned that intelligence reports showed "there is a trend toward underage victims" of both sexes.

Sabbath discs found

LONDON — Stolen gold and silver discs won by Ozzy Osbourne's band Black Sabbath were recovered Wednesday after thieves dumped them behind trash cans.

The discs were reported missing last week after a burglary at the home of Osbourne's former manager, Patrick Meehan, in Edenbridge, Kent, southeast England.

Kent Police said an anonymous tip led them to the eight discs, found in a plastic bag dumped behind recycling bins.

Czech draft done

PRAGUE, Czech Republic — The last Czech conscripts went home Wednesday, ending 140 years of draft in the country, an official said on Wednesday morning.

Spokesman for the Defense Ministry, Andrej Cirtak, said the last 1,876 conscripts left their garisons across the Czech Republic on Wednesday morning.

President Vaclav Klaus ratified the bill abolishing the draft last month, allowing the army to become fully professional as of Jan. 1.

The army now will have 23,870 career soldiers and 16,200 civil employees and plans to have 26,200 soldiers and 8,800 other employees by 2011.

Iran arrests 'spies'

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran has arrested military officers, Iranian workers and others on charges of revealing its nuclear secrets to Israel and U.S. intelligence agencies, Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi said.

Yunesi said the information passed to America and Israel was "without value," state media reported.

The minister said more than 10 suspects were detained in Tehran and in the southern Hormozgan province during the Iranian year that began March 21, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

"These people were spying for Mossad and CIA," IRNA quoted Yunesi as saying. He was referring to Israel's external security service and the Central Intelligence Agency.

From The Associated Press

EU warns Greece about deficit

The Associated Press

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The European Commission said Wednesday that Greece has failed to curb public spending, and forecast the country's 2004 and 2005 budget deficits will far exceed the maximum allowed under the rules of the euro currency.

In a stern report to EU governments — which can impose hefty fines on violators of the euro's finance rules — EU Finance Commissioner Joaquin Almunia said the Greek budget gap will be 5.3 percent of gross domestic product in 2004 and 3.6 percent in 2005 — both exceed the 3 percent maximum allowed under euro rules.

Almunia said the excessive deficits and a worsening debt situation will occur despite "buoyant economic activity" in recent years in Greece.

Greece also forecasts a debt-to-GDP ratio of 112.1 percent in 2004 — significantly higher than 109.9 percent in 2003. In 2005, it would still be a hefty 111.9 percent, the EU head office said.

Almunia told reporters the high cost of the 2004 Olympic Games was not the only reason for the excessive deficit. He spoke of "slippages" in spending

across the board. He said Athens' 2005 budget optimistically includes a "deficit of 2.8 percent, but the measures [to reach that goal] appear insufficient" to meet the EU's maximum 3 percent norm.

"Greece has taken no effective action to correct its excessive deficit," he said.

In theory, Greece faces hefty fines for persistently exceeding its annual budget gaps. However, that course of action is not easily pursued.

France and Germany — two countries that have exceeded the euro deficit rules — have so far escaped fines and been sanctioned instead into taking steps to reduce their deficits.

Almunia said the German deficit will be 2.9 percent in 2005 and the French will be 3 percent.

Greece already is in trouble with the EU for systematically underestimating its budget deficit in the years before and after it joined the euro zone in 2001. The EU always takes national governments at their word that the economic and other data they provide is correct and valid.

On Wednesday, the EU head office asked EU governments to give it more powers to review national economic and financial data.

Officer suspended

VA VIRGINIA BEACH — A police officer arrested during an alleged drug buy has been suspended from the force.

Jason Todd Armentrout, 30, who is being held without bond in the city jail, was off-duty and not armed when he was taken into custody, police said.

Don Rimer, a police spokesman, said Armentrout's arrest came after his name surfaced amid a much larger investigation. The probe by the department's Special Investigative Narcotics Unit began almost one year ago.

Its target has been people involved in the possession, sale and distribution of illegal narcotics, specifically Ecstasy and methamphetamine, Rimer said.

Investigators saw Armentrout and other suspects and watched as they attempt to purchase Ecstasy, Rimer said. Armentrout is charged with attempted possession of a controlled substance.

Rare texts, books sold

OH COLUMBUS — A former employee of the Kenyon College library has pleaded guilty to selling 50 rare books and other documents from the school's collection for \$26,000.

David Breithaupt now faces up to two years in prison and a fine of as much as \$250,000, according to the U.S. attorney's office.

Breithaupt, 45, sold most of the items, many of which were more than 100 years old, on eBay to buyers in 19 other states and four foreign countries. The sales took place between 1998 and 2002.

A copy made in 1528 of Ptolemy's "Almagest," an astronomy text originally written in ancient Greece, fetched the highest price at \$4,750, court documents said. Several other items sold were from the 1500s and 1600s. Breithaupt has agreed to pay restitution for recovery of the items.

School can go co-ed

NY AUBURN — A judge has denied a request by two students at Wells College, an all women liberal arts school, for an injunction to halt the institution's plan to allow men to enroll.

The State Supreme Court Justice Peter Corning said the main issue was the continued survival of the school. The lawsuit is challenging the coed decision on several grounds, including breach of contract.

Ape comes home

CA SAN FRANCISCO — A 23-year-old ape from Buffalo, N.Y., has returned to the San Francisco Zoo, his boyhood home, as the new king of Gorilla World.

In early January, he'll be liberated from quarantine and become the exhibit's top dog, filling a vacancy created in May when Kubi, his longtime patriarch, died. Since then, the four females have been left to their own devices. Anything, or nothing, could happen.

"They've been on their own without a male for a while," said gorilla keeper Mary Kerr. "They might have gotten the independent gene and not want to be dominated anymore. We'll see when he comes over whether his animal magnetism overcomes their independent streak."



AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Hole forces evacuation

FL DELTONA — A sinkhole opened beneath a road in central Florida, swallowing four lanes of pavement and forcing the evacuation of 20 homes.

Officials had been watching the hole after noticing collapsed asphalt on a street. Workers were pumping a cement mixture under the damaged road when the hole formed.

"All of the sudden, they started feeling rumblings in the ground," said Robert Rogers, deputy chief of the fire department in Deltona, about 25 miles southwest of Daytona Beach.

The ground opened up, destroying all four lanes. The hole grew to 50 feet deep and at least 150 feet wide.

The sinkhole also threatened to take down a major power line and forced authorities to evacuate 20 homes near the electrical wires.

Toy guns pulled

NY ALBANY — Thousands of toy guns have been pulled from the shelves of costume shops across the state as part of a settlement between the New York attorney general's office and two national wholesalers.

Attorney General Eliot Spitzer had accused the wholesalers of distributing more than 12,000 toy guns in 2001 in violation of a state law that previously applied only to retailers. Most of the wholesalers dealt with costume and novelty shops.



Making kids happy

Salvation Army volunteer Barb Reigelsperger of Naples, N.Y., tries to fit a few more toys on to the tables as she sets up for a toy distribution. People who pre-registered could choose five gifts per child, as well as a pair of mittens and stocking-stuffer gifts.

The state law bans realistic toy guns from being sold in stores unless they have permit, usually inch-wide orange stripes running down both sides of the barrel. Without admitting any wrongdoing, Rubie's Costumes Co. agreed to pay \$27,000 in civil penalties and costs and Franco American Novelty Co. agreed to pay \$10,000.

Flight may be abuse

IN BLOOMINGTON — Some Indiana University students could face a hefty fine for tossing a guinea pig from a dormitory window with a makeshift parachute.

The students used a garbage bag, dental floss and masking tape to create a parachute and then dropped the animal, Bloomington Animal Shelter manager Leigh Ann Hoffacker said.

Fortunately, the guinea pig landed in a tree and survived. The trembling rodent was discovered moments later by freshman Laura Robinson.

School janitors were able to reach the animal through a third-floor window and Robinson took it to the shelter.

The identities of the students who tossed the guinea pig have yet to be determined, but Hoffacker said the list has been narrowed down by dorm administration.

Police likely would not do much, she said, but the shelter's animal control office can issue a \$500 ticket for animal abuse.

Cocaine found in wreck

WV WHEELING — Authorities called to the scene of a plane crash found no people dead or alive — but they did find \$24 million worth of cocaine. Federal authorities were seeking the pilot, identified as Eugene N. Cobbs, on a charge of possession with intent to distribute cocaine, U.S. Attorney Thomas E. Johnston.

The Piper Aerostar twin-engine plane crashed in a wooded area near the Wheeling-Ohio County Airport, said James Peters, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration.

Authorities found about 327 pounds of cocaine packaged in blocks and another 193 pounds turned up in the plane's nose compartment, Johnston said. Authorities were searching for a man believed to be Cobbs, who was picked up by a motorist near the airport's front entrance. His forehead was cut and he asked for a ride to a hotel.

Couple pays town's bills

IA ANTHON — Home and business owners in this northwest Iowa town of 650 people were a little shocked at the Christmas gift they got from a tired farmer Richard Hamann and his wife, Donna.

The Hamanns doled out \$25,000 to pay the town's electricity bills — all due on Dec. 25.

Hamann, 75, sees the gift as returning a good deed.

Residents said they were surprised and grateful.

"I just thought it was great," said Beulah Sands, 64, a clerk at a local convenience store. "I haven't talked to anyone who didn't appreciate it. It was a wonderful thing for him to do."



Massive reading assignment Jessica Zampella, foreground, and other students at Central Elementary in Osford, Miss., are sprawled out on the floor as they attempt to collectively read 12,000 pages.



On the way up

A skier takes a ride on the ski lift at Paoli Peaks in Paoli, Ind.



Zamboni explodes

Duluth, Minn., firefighters run hoses to battle a blaze at Peterson Arena in West Duluth after a Zamboni exploded inside the arena.



Jogger's best friends Lisa Schlimmer jogs with her dogs, Josie, left, and Lacey, at the city playfields in Pullman, Wash. Schlimmer is a student at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Washington State University.



Stacked for fire

Heath Melancon, from Grand Point near Lutcher, La., trims the last logs on an 18-foot-high bonfire structure on the Mississippi River levee, that will be lit at 7 p.m. Christmas Eve.



White Christmas

A Christmas tree stands in the gazebo at Kershaw Park along Canandaigua Lake in Canandaigua, N.Y.

Letter finally sent

WI INDEPENDENCE — Jane Matchey recently became better acquainted with the late father she never met after receiving a letter he wrote six decades ago.

When Sgt. Henry Longmier left to fight in World War II, his new wife Teresa was pregnant with Jane.

The 31-year-old soldier was killed by a German sniper in Belgium in the waning days of the Battle of the Bulge in 1945.

Prior to that, in late 1944, he and three other soldiers lived in a Dutch village for a time in the home of the Neederlants family.

It seems Longmier neglected to mail the letter to his wife in Wisconsin. When the soldiers moved on, a Neederlants family member discovered the letter while cleaning the room they stayed in.

Only recently did the Neederlants' grandson, Lando Mullenbeers, 38, become curious about its intended recipient, having heard stories of the soldiers.

5 arrested on Cape Cod

MA ORLEANS — Five people were arrested and more than \$1.6 million worth of jewelry, paintings and marine equipment was recovered on Cape Cod, authorities said. Police identified those arrested as George Upton, 52, his brother, Frank Upton, 41, and Mark Fornal, 41. Police said they found the paintings behind a fake wall and jewelry in a hollowed-out staircase in Frank Upton's home.

Rage cited in crash

FL LARGO — Two cars raced in a deadly dance of road rage, police said.

The Lexus pulled in front of the Volkswagen and slammed on the brakes. Then the Volkswagen did the same. The leaping occurred until the Volkswagen smashed into a utility pole, fatally injuring the driver, Jacquelyn Palfy, 20. Two passengers in her car were injured.

The young man seen driving the Lexus drove away after the crash, police Sgt. Andy Hill said.

Santa Claus shot

CA OXNARD — Police were dispatched to the large Santa Claus statue here after shots were fired at it.

Officers found five bullet holes marring the jolly face of old St. Nick. Five 9 mm casings were lying on the street nearby, police said.

Mike Barber, Santa's caretaker, said the gunshots shattered the lenses on Santa's glasses and broke the frames. He and a friend used screws, glue and wire to patch the frames back together.

The 20-foot, nearly five-ton plaster Santa statue was moved in January 2003 from Santa Barbara County to the lot on Ventura Boulevard. The statue had stood for 50 years on top of a malt shop and candy store near Carpinteria.

Sole witness dies

MD BALTIMORE — The sole witness to the fatal shooting of a civilian police employee in 1974 has died of a heart attack,

police said.

Police declined to name the witness and they insisted the death will not affect the prosecution of Michael Hughes, who had been a fugitive for 30 years before his arrest in Boston this fall.

The shooting occurred Christmas Eve 1974, McKinley Johnson Jr. was distributing Christmas food baskets at a west Baltimore bar when he got into an argument with Hughes, police said. The alleged confrontation continued outside the bar where Johnson was shot.

Big garages needed

AZ MESA — Now not only is keeping up with the Joneses a daily pressure, but it may become a law.

The town of Gilbert is considering changing its zoning code to set a minimum interior garage size for homes in this southeast Phoenix suburb.

"We drive Suburbans, Excursions and Silverados, extended cabs, and they won't fit in small garages," said Planning and Zoning Commission chairwoman Brigitte Peterson at a recent meeting.

When recommending the change, town staff told the commission that 74 percent of registered vehicles in Gilbert are trucks or sport utility vehicles.

The current code only requires two enclosed parking spaces and has no size minimum.

Aging center renamed

UT SALT LAKE CITY — The University of Utah is changing the name of its center that focuses on older Americans. The school's Gerontology Center will become the Center on Aging, a change the school says reflects increases in Utah's 65-and-older population.

That group increased 27 percent in the last 10 years, and will rise another 28 percent in the next decade.

Welfare caseloads drop

NJ TRENTON — Worker caseloads at the state's child welfare system have dropped by almost 10 percent since officials began working in July to reform the agency. However, officials said the caseloads still exceed the target set in the reform plan. The Division of Youth and Family Services has a troubled history that includes the deaths of some children and abuse of others who were supposed to be under supervision.

\$100K reward offered

MS JACKSON — An anonymous donor has posted a \$100,000 reward for information leading to murder charges in one of the most notorious crimes of the civil rights era — the "Freedom Summer" slayings of three civil rights workers in 1964.

The reward will be administered by an interfaith organization as the state renewed efforts to bring charges in the killings of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman.

In 1964, the three volunteers helping to register black voters were murdered on a lonely dirt road as they drove to a church to investigate a fire.

Stories and photos from wire services

YOUR MONEY

IM-ing at workplace not always productive

BY JULIE FORSTER

Knight Ridder Newspapers

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Instant messaging — real-time text conversation that takes place in private online chat areas — is beginning to mount a challenge to conventional e-mail in the workplace.

Some 11 million people are estimated to be using "IM" at work.

In a study of 850 companies most of the workplace IM users said they engage in personal chats. Among the chat-room fodder: jokes, insider information about the company or a client and even sexual content.

"Most workplaces don't know how to deal with instant messaging."

said Amanda Lenhart, co-author of a report on the technology from the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

"They wonder, is this a productivity tool or a waste of time?"

Many take a "don't ask, don't tell," attitude about employees downloading instant messaging

Research into users of IM suggests reason for concern. The Pew Internet project found one of three users it studied believes IM prompts gossip.

The American Management Association found in a study of 850 companies this year most of the workplace IM users said they engage in personal chats. Among the chat-room fodder: jokes, insider information about the company or a client and even sexual content.

Use of IM is growing and rivals e-mail for some age groups.

Fifty-three million adult Internet users traded instant messages in 2004, up 29 percent from 2000, when the Pew Internet & American Life Project first started tracking its use.

This year, it estimated work place use at 11 million. Among users who are 18 to 27 years of age, 46 percent use it more than e-mail, the group found.

"This is one of those things where you really have to go back to the introduction of PCs them-

selves," said Lou Latham, principal analyst at Gartner, a technology research group in Stamford, Conn.

"In the late '70s, and early '80s, people were sneaking them into the office. It was considered a strange and alien ... technology by the persons that he."

Companies like Stellar Technologies in Naples, Fla., are trying to help employers understand the latest alien. It sells software to businesses that acts as a security guard, recording IM activity and allowing bosses to monitor employee real-time chats.

Toby Dutter was surprised at what he found out when he logged on to monitor what his employees were doing.

The vice president of Indian-head Insurance Agency in Eau Claire, Wis., gave monitoring soft-

was a try on the advice of his IT consultant. Dutter did not want to ban instant messaging because it was a convenient, quick way for employees dispersed among six offices to communicate without playing phone tag. But he still wondered what all that tapping was about.

"I think employers would be amazed to find out what's going on," he said. Dutter said he found a lot of time-wasting chat — weekend plans were a popular topic — among the 50 employees in the firm when he first monitored various chats. Volume tapered off when he told his staff they were being watched.

Some still did not take him seriously. So he printed out their IM chats and showed them the hard

Instant messaging

U.S. adults who use instant messaging and those who use it at work, according to a recent

Estimated adult users In millions	Of at-work users, percent who say it saves time: 50%
---------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------

41 **53** Provides relief from grind: 47%

Encourages gossip: 32%

Is a distraction: 29%

Year	Users at work (millions)
2000	~2.5
2004	11

2000 2004 **Users at work**
© 2004 KRT
Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project
Graphic: St. Paul Pioneer Press

copy. Gulp. Case closed

Disciplined Growth Investors, a money management firm in Minneapolis, uses the Stellar application too, but more as a means to archive communication in the highly regulated securities industry.

Conversations between portfolio managers and clients need to be saved for regulators, said Shawn Buckroyd, the company's network administrator. "Instant messenger is one of the hot buttons for the SEC to audit," she said.

While many are wary, a growing number of employers are embracing what they see as big benefits.

Fallon Worldwide, a Minneapolis advertising agency, is rolling out Lotus instant messaging software to about 400 employees in seven offices worldwide.

Soon all will have one sanctioned, company-supported messaging system and the ability to integrate that system with the firm's e-mail address books. If they want, workers can route their instant messages to their cell phones, said Rich McGeheran, Fallon's director of IT.

It is a way to give globetrotting employees access to information cheaper than a phone call and more quickly than e-mail. And everyone is on the same page instead of having the headaches and security issues of people on all different versions.

Some Fallon employees have been testing it. "We use it for instantaneous communication," McGehean said. "It's quick. I'm not sending someone an e-mail waiting for someone to respond. I send a message. Ding, they get it. Ding, they respond. It's instant gratification."

Steve McFarland, president of technology outsourcing firm Orbit Systems in Eagan, Minn., acknowledges IM is popular among the 32 tech workers in his office. He's not

"I'll get on the instant messaging system and use it for a period of time until it drives me crazy," McFarland said. "Then, I won't get back on it for months."

TUESDAY'S MARKET SUMMARY							
INDEXES							
52-week High	Low	Name	Point	% Chg	Net Chg	YTD % Chg	52-week % Chg
10,851.50	10,789.43	Dow Jones Industrials	10,789.43	+1.81	+1.81	+1.81	+1.81
3,770.55	3,741.41	Dow Jones Transportation	3,732.09	+2.61	+1.64	+1.64	+2.61
3,360.25	2,946.46	Dow Jones Utilities	3,357.21	+0.26	+1	+25.3	+26.70
7,351.98	6,311.17	NYSE Composite	7,187.45	+0.63	+10	+11.28	+12.77
1,417.69	1,318.28	Amex Index	1,411.92	-2.65	-19	+30	+23.18
2,171.27	1,750.82	Nasdaq Composite	2,150.91	+0.22	+108	+7.21	+8.52
1,207.77	1,060.71	S&P 500	1,205.45	+1.89	+39	+70.89	+6.98
656.25	548.29	S&P MidCap	655.20	+0.58	+578	+10.85	+14.44
1,207.77	1,060.71	S&P SmallCap	1,205.45	+1.89	+39	+70.89	+6.98
11,896.30	10,295.52	DJ Wilshire 5000	10,881.20	+10.99	+32	+83.01	+4.90

[illegible][illegible]

Exchange rates	
Military rates	
Dollar costs	\$1,3736
British pound	£0.7280
Japanese yen (Dec. 23)	¥101.80
South Korean (Dec. 22)	₩100.00
Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.2758
British pound	\$1.9279
Cyprus (Dollar)	1.2324
Denmark (Krone)	6.4624
Egypt (Pound)	0.2904
Greece (Drachma)	\$1,3377/100
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7798
Hungary (Forint)	163.25
Iceland (Krona)	134.36
Israel (Shekel)	4.3309
Japan (Yen)	104.38
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.29460
Norway (Krone)	4.7563
Philippines (Peso)	56.13
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.59
Singapore (Dollar)	1.5462
South Korea (Won)	100.50
Taiwan (Dollar)	20.475
Thailand (Baht)	25.46
Turkey (Lira)	1,354,000.00
U.S. Military	\$1,354,000.00

available to exchange rates at military bank facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates

ny), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interest rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

PRECIOUS METALS

London close	
Gold	\$440.50
Silver	\$6.83

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	5.25
Discount rate	3.25
Federal funds market rate	2.25
3-month bill	2.75
30-year bond	4.80

Source: The Associated Press, Bank of

Cents and Sensible

Money tip of the day

Don't forget holiday tips

CBS MarketWatch

NEW YORK — As you check off items on your holiday to-do list, don't forget to tip your hairdresser, baby sitter and other service providers.

Holiday tips are a traditional way of showing your appreciation to the people who make your life easier throughout the year. Tipping is also a way to ensure that you continue to receive quality service in the year to come, says Todd R.R. Smith, president of Mannesmann, a Boston-based etiquette consulting firm.

Smith suggests you should tip nannies or baby sitters, your building superintendent, maids or housekeepers, lawn maintenance or snow removal teams, your newspaper deliverer, hair stylist, manicurist, garbage removal team and other service people you regularly use.

You should base the amount on how often you use the service. For example, if you typically pay your housekeeper \$100 per week, you should tip at least \$100. Ask neighbors or

given. The amount can vary widely, depending on where you live. You need to be able to judge what is appropriate for your," says Smith. Some businesses or organizations may even stipulate mandatory holiday tips in their contracts with you.

You might also figure in the frequency of who contact with the recipient. For example, if you constantly call the super to your apartment to fix plumbing problems, you might tip more than if you exchange only an occasional "hello" in the halls.

There are other people you interact with who should be recognized for their service, but should be given a gift rather than a tip. Smith notes that some workers, such as postal and other government employees, are not permitted to accept money. Others, such as teachers, might be insulted by being tipped. You might consider small tokens of your appreciation or gift cards for these people.

If handing out tips has caught you by surprise, it's never too late. You can add in tips to your holiday budget. Otherwise, "the end of year crunch can be very painful,"

Stripes Travel



AP photos

Above: Fireworks in Frankfurt, Germany, welcome a past new year with a bang. At right, a British couple and an American raise glasses as they celebrate the new year on the Champs Elysees in Paris.



The party's everywhere

Europe offers a new year's celebration to fit your mood

BY KAREN BRADBURY
Stars and Stripes

When it comes to celebrating on New Year's Eve in Europe, you don't have to look far for a party.

Virtually everywhere, from small towns to big cities, has something going on, even if it is just setting off fireworks or toasting the new year with the neighbors.

But that may not be enough for those looking for something extra special. For them, we offer the following suggestions.

Big-city fun

If New Year's Eve conjures images for you of mass gatherings in public squares, London's fireworks-and-lighting display might be just the thing for you.

The London Eye, the observation wheel alongside the River

Thames, will serve as the focal point for the launching of fireworks and a light display. The display will be visible from vantage points throughout the city and broadcast live on television.

Large crowds are also anticipated in Trafalgar and Parliament squares. London's public transportation services will run throughout the night on New Year's Eve, and will offer free travel between 11:45 p.m. and 4:30 a.m. For more information, see www.london.gov.uk.

Another unforgettable New Year's experience is expected in Berlin. Last year, more than a million visitors took up the city's offer to attend what it bills as the "the largest open-air party world-wide."

Berlin's unique atmosphere is derived from a fusion of music, light, stage shows, dance floors, DJs and a fantastic fireworks display. Events take place along a 2-kilometer stretch of road. To

join in, head toward the area between the Brandenburg Gate and the Column of Victory.

Although it goes without saying that adequate winter outerwear is the order of the evening, there will be tents set up to serve as warming stations. Find out more at www.silvester-berlin.de.

Vienna at New Year's offers a particularly varied program. The city's Old Town will feature a New Year's Eve trail winding through its narrow streets, lined by food stalls and music stages. Various styles of music will be played throughout the city. While one area will feature the swinging songs of the Rat Pack, including songs by Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr. and Dean Martin, another will feature DJs playing Caribbean tunes and rock 'n' roll. Lovers of classical music should head to the courtyard of the House of Music.

Alternately, book a boat trip on the Danube or attend the Gala at

the City Hall. On Jan. 1, the New Year's Day Concert will be broadcast on video screens throughout the city. For more information, check out the city's Web site at www.info.wien.at.

Lisbon's Festas da Passagem do Ano will take place on the waterfront of the Parque das Nações and Belém. Concerts, street entertainment, fireworks and other freebies create a lively atmosphere. More information on Lisbon's festivities can be found at www.visitlisboa.com.

When smaller is better

If a smaller town is more to your liking, you could head to the Czech Republic's picturesque town of Karlovy Vary. The Grandhotel Pupp will host a gala show and a fireworks display.

Germany's mid-sized cities and towns will be in full swing with parties galore, mostly hosted at private venues and for

which you need to get tickets in advance. To find out what a specific city has on offer, you can generally find its Web site by entering www, then the city's name and .de.

New year, old customs

In Switzerland's Appenzellerland, you might witness a new year's *chiluse* (claus), masked and elaborately costumed figures roaming about the village. Generally traveling in groups of six, they ring their bells and yodel, wishing happiness and prosperity in return for money and *Glühwein*. Their frightening dress is specially designed to scare away evil spirits.

If you miss this event on New Year's Eve, you have another chance to witness it on Jan. 13, when a new year dawns according to the Gregorian calendar. This event is celebrated in the

SEE NEW YEAR, PAGE 24



KRT

Above: The Spanish Baroque towers of the cathedral rise in weathered layers of granite in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. At right: Narrow streets bustle with the flow of traffic through Spain's famous city.



Journey of the sole

Believers and the curious walk Spain's 'Way of St. James'

BY THOMAS SWICK

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

The pharmacies in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, are rich in foot-care products. This is not because the city produces bad shoes, but because it is filled with pilgrims. They come from all over the world, walking across the north of Spain, sometimes starting in France, to enter the portals of the great weathered cathedral in this Galician city, which, according to legend, contains the remains of the apostle James.

El Camino de Santiago, or "The Way of St. James," is a curious phenomenon, begun in the early Middle Ages — when pilgrims in wide-brim hats sought absolution for their sins, the promise of eternal life — and

perpetuated today by students, vacationers, New Agers and mid-lifers in search of something from enlightenment to exercise.

The new, personalized approach has turned the walk into a growth industry at a time when Catholicism is in serious decline, most notably in Europe. The pilgrimage's potent one-two punch of spirituality and the open road have attracted numerous writers, everyone from the Dutch novelist Cees Nooteboom to the Brazilian fabulist Paulo Coelho, from Rosemary Mahoney (author of "Whoredom in Kimmage") to, most recently, Kathryn Harrison, famous for her memoir about her seduction by her father. The books, especially Coelho's, have helped to lighten modern interest in a medieval custom.

Whatever their purpose, today's pilgrims share at least one thing with the ancients: suffering. Though better equipped, and more sensibly shod (few wear sandals today), they still walk great distances, day after monotonous day, often through showers (the rain in Spain falls mainly in the north).

And they still spend their nights in modest hostels or, when there are no beds available, under the stars. It is a harsh penance, a grueling touring strategy, a drastic diet plan. As they make their way into Santiago limping, bandaged, heavy-laden, though sometimes singing, and splashing in fountains — it is only the most hardened who cannot feel their pain. And joy.

The city, with its close granite buildings, goes well with pilgrims. Moving with their walking sticks

through the narrow streets, they look infinitely more at home than, say, cellphone users. The distinctive sound of Santiago is the click of metal-tipped walking sticks touching stone pavement; a blind man visiting the city would imagine it full of people like himself.

Summer, understandably, is the most popular time to make the pilgrimage, and the summer of a Holy Year, like 2004, when the Feast of St. James fell on a Sunday, brings great crowds, chipper tourists rubbing fanny packs with weary foot soldiers and the almost invisible locals. Everyone is pulled in the direction of the cathedral, an unfathomable mass of stairways and annexes and soaring towers rising in the heart of the city and bookended by two imposing plazas.

SEE SPAIN, PAGE 26

*People line the
Praza da Quintana
for hours, waiting
for the opportunity
to enter the
cathedral and
embrace the statue
of the saint and
visit his 'grave.'*

SPAIN, FROM PAGE 25

The Praza do Obradoiro fronts the main entrance. Visitors climb a double staircase and, once inside, make their way under the Portico de la Gloria, three 12th-century arches carved with biblical scenes.

Pilgrims pause to touch the pillar, divoted by centuries of caresses, that stands beneath the feet of St. James.

Then, their eyes adjusting to the darkness, they make out the oversized bust of the apostle above the altar. And then, strangely, what seems to be a hand coming around one side. Then the hand disappears, and another takes its place. These belong to the people who have been lining the Praza da Quintana for hours, waiting for the opportunity to enter the cathedral, from the back, and embrace the statue of the saint and visit his "grave." (A sign reads: "Hug the apostle. Visit the tomb.")

A top the canopy is an image of Santiago Matamoros, St. James the Moor-slayer. Even more far-fetched than the idea of St. James' remains ending up in Galicia (he was martyred in Jerusalem) is the legend that has him appearing miraculously in 844, on a white horse, and helping the Spanish defeat the Moors in the Battle of Clavijo.

Whatever its truth, the story has proved a potent force in history. In the city's pilgrimage museum, panels explain that when the Spanish arrived in the New World, Indians "assimilated St. James into their war-mongering gods," so that St. James the Moor-slayer, who had, through travel, become St. James the Indian-slayer, eventually became St. James the Spaniard-slayer. His status grew so that not only churches but cities from Cuba to Chile were named after him.

The Frenchman looked weary. The last few days were difficult, he said, standing with his pilgrim wife in the Praza do Obradoiro.

"All the hostels were full. You can do just the last 100 kilometers (and still get absolution for your sins) so there are a lot of people. We spent the last four nights sleeping on the ground."

"Today was a bit disappointing. We couldn't attend the mass, because the cathedral was full. So we'll come back this evening."

"Last night, we met a Pole," he



KRT

The Spanish Baroque cathedral in Santiago de Compostela features intricate carvings from earlier religious times.

continued, "who walked from Le Puy (in central France). When he got here he found it was a four-hour wait to get his certificate saying he'd completed the pilgrimage. So he didn't wait. He went back to Krakow."

The line this past summer, when I visited, often wrapped around the pilgrimage office and trickled down Rua Nova. Pilgrims waited patiently, relieved,

perhaps, just to be stationary. One afternoon, in the nearby Praza das Praterias, some young people appeared on the roof of a cathedral annex and unfurled a banner.

"It's a protest against the wildfires," a young woman said, explaining that they were a problem every summer. "Most

of them are set by people, and the government is not doing anything to stop them."

Another young man moved through the crowd, handing out little cellophane packets. They read "Fragrances of Galicia." They were filled with cinders.

A man dressed as a witch, posed children on a broomstick in back of the cathedral.

"We have a good witch in Santiago," the shop assistant said. "She makes a concoction that makes people well. She is a health witch."

People in Madrid will tell you that Galicians are afraid of witches, which is why you don't find many mushrooms on restaurant menus. They refuse to go into the woods and pick them, so say the Madrilenos. Italians come and ship them home in tractor-trailers.

This seems a bit far-fetched, especially for a people who for centuries have been fearless when facing the sea.

Alberto was not Galician but Colombian. The store was owned

by a compatriot, an artist, who had used the street as his studio — making beautifully detailed pen-and-ink drawings of Santiago — until city authorities told him to move. With his earnings, he purchased this shop on Rua do Vilar.

Alberto had come to town more recently. "I lived in California and Miami. My wife's family is from Galicia, and we said, 'Let's try something different.'"

"There is a whole different pace here. We have a 2-year-old son, and I think this is a good place to bring him up. Santiago has something special about it. The people are modest. They don't show off."

"There are cultural activities, in the summer every day. And

they're free or very inexpensive. Bob Dylan was here on (the feast of St. James). Lou Reed was here, too. David Bowie was supposed to make it, but he couldn't." Good that the apostle's grave is not really here, because there would have been feverish spinning in it.

Winters are tough, gray and damp. But Alberto downplayed the grimness. People say that in Santiago, because of the way the drizzle makes the granite glisten, "rain is art."

A mime played to the crowd in the Praza da Quintana. He had a captive audience, as people waited to enter the cathedral. He pulled a young woman out of the line, conjured a bouquet from inside his sportjacket and then,

with equal ease, plucked a white veil from out of nowhere, which he also presented to his new "bride."

He pointed to his cheek and requested a peck. As soon as the young woman's lips came close, he spun his head round for a stolen kiss. The audience howled.

It took him 15 minutes to walk the length of the line, which snaked back and forth across the plaza, and receive his donations. When he was finished, he climbed the steps to the upper level. Halfway there, a beggar approached him. He tossed two handfuls of coins into the beggar's hat. The audience applauded in appreciation. He stood up straight, and applauded the beggar.

If you go

• **Getting there:** Well, you could walk. The routes along the Way of St. James, apparently, are very well marked.

I took the 2 p.m. train from Madrid that got me into Santiago about 10 at night. For schedules, information, etc. check www.renfe.es. There are also daily flights from Madrid.

• **Getting around:** A compact car, so make like a pilgrim and, yes, walk.

• **Lodging:** I stayed in the excellent Hotel Real in the heart of the city at Caldereria 49. My small, elegant room was about \$60 a night and had a thin balcony overlooking the pedestrian street. The staff was wonderfully friendly. Phone: (+34) (0) 981-56-92-90; fax: (+34) (0) 981-56-92-91; Web: www.hotel-real.com.

For something more elegant, and historic, there's the Parador de los Reyes Católicos, de la Obradoiro 1.

Built in the 15th century by the Spanish royal family as a hostel for pilgrims, it is now a luxury hotel set around four tranquil courtyards.

Rooms start about \$230 a night. Tel: (+34) (0) 981-58-22-00; fax: (+34) (0) 981-56-30-94; Web: www.parador.es.

• **Food:** Galicia is famous for its seafood, Santiago for its scallops — the shell is the symbol of St. James and was once worn by pilgrims. There is a delicious local dish of scallops and bacon in a tomato-based sauce, eaten from the shell. Octopus is very good, steamed and served simply in oil with a sprinkling of paprika. Mussels, clams and a variety of crabs are also excellent, because they're all fresh. Pimientos de Padrón are small green peppers fried in oil, generally mild but every once in a while one singses your tongue. For dessert, try the almond cake *tarta de Santiago*.

— THOMAS SWICK

At midnight, the Praza do Obradoiro was dark and dry and echoing with song. Under the arcade of the town hall, a dozen young men strummed guitars and sang old ballads. They were dressed as medieval troubadours, in floppy hats and baggy pants, and looked like undergrads. (Santiago is not just a cathedral but a university town; in the fall, the crowds of pilgrims are replaced by students.)

About a hundred people stood listening and laughing, and frequently singing along. They were tourists, you could tell; the pilgrims were long unconscious from fatigue. There was an easy-going familiarity between musicians and spectators, an unspoken cultural solidarity in the shared lyrics and the playful banter.

Having come from around the country, they all seemed equally at home, and united in the late-night business of having fun. Two girls walked out from under the archways and danced on the plaza, the great floodlights spires of the cathedral towering before them.

Distributed by Knight-Ridder/Tribune. Email Thomas Swick at this South Florida Sun-Sentinel address: tswick@sun-sentinel.com.

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Holy Land se



Above: Greek Orthodox worshippers pass the holy fire to fellow worshippers around the tomb of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Below: The golden Dome of the Rock stands out on the skyline of Jerusalem's Old City.



AP/Stars and Stripes



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Jewish worshippers walk away from the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site, in Jerusalem's Old City.

Here you can see stones, cisterns and a Hasmonian water channel used 2,000 years ago.

The Old City's Arab market shops are a must. You can buy vests decorated with traditional Palestinian embroidery, hand-painted Armenian pottery and fresh sesame and pistachio brittle. Hagglng is an art you

must master quickly. In most cases it's best to offer half the price you are first quoted and work your way up to about two-thirds of what the seller asks. Try not to show that you really want the item or the shop owners won't budge much.

Traveling from Jerusalem just a few miles away to the West Bank

town of Bethlehem can seem somewhat daunting since tourists must pass through an Israeli military checkpoint. But don't mind the M-16 guns held by the Israeli soldiers. This area has not seen clashes in more than a year and they are unlikely here since both Israelis and Palestin-

ians are eager to facilitate the travel

of pilgrims.
Manger Square is not the quaint, scene depicted in "O Little Town of Bethlehem." It is often full of tour buses. However, the stone Church of the Nativity is filled with fragrant incense and is a wonderful sight when full of worshippers at the midnight Mass on Christmas Eve.



Travel warning

The U.S. State Department updated its travel warning regarding Israel as follows at press time:
"Terrorist attacks have occurred in Israel and in areas frequented by Israeli tourists across the Israeli border with Egypt, and there are ongoing concerns regarding locations associated with American interests in Israel. ... In addition, instability related to the death of Yasser Arafat and upcoming Palestinian Authority elections remains a possibility. ... The Department of State continues to warn U.S. citizens to depart Gaza immediately and to defer travel to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza due to current safety and security concerns."
To check updates, go to <http://travel.state.gov>, click on "Warnings" and select "Israel/The West Bank and Gaza."

A Palestinian girl walks past Israeli border officers standing guard in the street as she makes her way to the Al Aqsa Mosque compound for traditional Muslim Friday prayers in Jerusalem's Old City.

Ski Clubs & Events

COMPILED BY
KAREN BRADBURY
Stars and Stripes

This column lists contacts for ski clubs and other organizations that offer ski trips, and provides updated schedules of events as space allows. Here are trips scheduled through February. The fastest way to add, correct or update a listing is to send information by e-mail to: travel@mail.estripes.osd.mil.

estripes.osd.mil. You also may fax it to: (+49) (0) 6155-601-416. For help, please call, (+49) (0) 6155-601-380.

ITALY

AVIANO SKI CLUB

Area: Northern Italy

Web site: www.avianskiclub.com

Telephone: 0434 366

185 (Gloria Leonardiuzzi, Vice President)

Trips: Dec. 26-Jan. 1; St. Veit, Austria, \$425; Jan. 14-17, Madonna di Campiglio, Italy, \$225; Jan. 29-30, Sella Ronda and Arabba, \$150; Feb. 12-19, Sestriere, Italy, \$695; Feb. 18-21, Lake Bled, Slovenia, \$190.

GERMANY

FRANKFURT INTERNATIONAL SKI CLUB

Telephone: 069-9720-3669

E-mail: info@fiscweb.org

Web site: www.fiscweb.org

Address: c/o Trevor Wolf, CMR 453, Box 639, APO AE 09074, or c/o Rob Pinnington, Im Stichel 2, 61273 Wehrheim, Germany

Meetings: 7 p.m. every other Wednesday at The Fox and The Fiddle Pub and Music Hall, Bleichstrasse 46, Frankfurt.

Trips: Dec. 26-Jan. 1, St. Veit I, Austria, \$95 euros; Dec. 29-Jan. 2, Interlaken/Jungfrau, Switzerland, \$95 euros; Jan. 7-9, Kitzbühel, Austria, \$220 euros; Jan. 14-16, Aletschgebiet, Switzerland, \$185 euros; Jan. 14-17, St. Anton, Austria, \$275 euros; Jan. 21-23, Davos, Switzerland, \$285 euros; Jan. 28-30, Andermatt, Switzerland, \$195 euros; Jan. 29, Schwarzwald, Germany, \$40 euros; Feb. 4-6, Champoluc, Italy, \$425 euros; Feb. 4-6, Adelboden, Switzerland, \$255 euros; Feb. 11-13, Villars, Switzerland, \$245 euros; Feb. 13-15, St. Veit II, Austria, \$380 euros; Feb. 18-20, Verbier, Switzerland, \$195 euros; Feb. 18-21, Crans-Montana, \$265 euros; Feb. 25-27, Zell am See, Austria, \$200 euros; Feb. 26-March 5, Banff, Canada, \$780 euros.

Airfare not included in price of Banff trip.

GRAFENWÖHR SKI AND SNOWBOARDING CLUB

Area: Grafenwöhr/Vilseck

Telephone: DSN 476-1560, or

civilian 0964-1833560

E-mail: anthonny.neaverth@us.army.mil



Fog and clouds cap the skiing facilities in Val d'Isère, France, on Friday. The women's World Cup downhill race was postponed twice due to high winds and light snow on the mountain then.

Meetings: 7 p.m. on first and third Thursday of each month in Italian Restaurant La Dino in Grafenwöhr.

Trips: Jan. 13-15, St. Johann, Austria, price TBA; Feb. 17-25, Dolomites Kronplatz, Italy, price TBA.

HEIDELBERG INTERNATIONAL SKI CLUB

Telephone: 06202-577-8422

E-mail: president@heidelbergski.com

Web site: www.heidelbergski.com

Address: CMR 419 Box 909, APO AE 09102 or Postfach 105743, 69115 Heidelberg

Meetings: 7 p.m. every other Wednesday at Hotel Zagreb in Schwetzingen.

Trips: Jan. 9-15, St. Veit, Austria, \$380 euros; Jan. 14-17, Portes du Soleil, France, \$275 euros; Jan. 14-17, Saas Fee, Switzerland, \$230 euros; Jan. 28-30, Wengen, Switzerland, \$225 euros; Feb. 4-6, Kitzbühel, Austria, \$235 euros; Feb. 11-13, Crans Montana, Switzerland, \$290 euros; Feb. 18-21, Bad Gastein, Austria, \$325; Feb. 18-21, Flims Lax, Switzerland, \$225 euros; Feb. 20-26, St. Veit II, Austria, \$400 euros.

KAISERSLAUTERN SKI CLUB

Area: Kaiserslautern Military Community

bed & breakfast; Jan. 21-23, Grindelwald, Switzerland, \$25 euros; Jan. 22-29, Kitzbühel, Austria, \$330 euros, half-pension; Jan. 28-30, Lech/Zurs/St. Anton, Switzerland, \$330 euros; Feb. 4-6, Portes du Soleil, \$145 euros; Feb. 18-21, St. Anton, Austria, \$180 euros; bed & breakfast; Feb. 25-27, Portes du Soleil, \$145 euros.

PATCH SKI CLUB

Area: Stuttgart

Telephone: DSN 430-5789

E-mail: info@psc-ski.org

Web site: www.patchskiclub.org

Address: CMR 480, Box 198, APO AE 09128

Meetings: Patch Community Club at 7 p.m. Next: Jan. 5 and 19.

Trips: Dec. 26-Jan. 2, Lausanne, France, \$60 euros; Dec. 26-Jan. 1, Siegi I-St. Veit, Austria, \$480 euros; Dec. 30-Jan. 2, Verbier, Switzerland, \$210 euros; Jan. 13-17, Saas Fee, Switzerland, \$380 euros; Jan. 14-17, Kitzbühel, Austria, \$300 euros; Siegi II-St. Veit, Austria, \$390 euros; Jan. 28-30, Zell am See, Austria, \$205 euros; Feb. 4-6, Engelberg, Switzerland, \$190 euros; Feb. 18-21, Jungfrau, Switzerland, \$230 euros.

TANNENBAUM SKI CLUB

Area: Kaiserslautern Military Community, Eifel, Baumholder, Mannheim regions, Rheinland-Pfalz and Spangdahlem

E-mail: Dave Hanavan, dave@tannenbaumskiclub.com; Rick Kane, rickvp@tannenbaumskiclub.com

Telephone: 06301-3478

Web address: www.tannenbaumskiclub.com

Meetings: First and third Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. in Landstuhl Combined Community Club.

Trips: Dec. 26-Jan. 2, Dolomites Super Ski Week, \$330 euros; Jan. 14-17, Chamonix, France, \$250 euros; Jan. 14-17, Zell-am-See, Austria, \$240 euros; Jan. 14-17, Crans-Montana, Switzerland, \$240 euros; Jan. 30-Feb. 5, Siegi Ski Week II, St. Veit-Alpstein, Austria, price TBA; Feb. 4-6, Gstaad, Switzerland, \$195 euros; Feb. 18-21, Verbier-4 Valleys, Switzerland, \$210 euros; Feb. 18-21, Portes du Soleil, France, \$245 euros; Feb. 18-21, Bad Gastein, Austria, \$235 euros.

WESTPALZ INTERNATIONAL SKI CLUB

Area: Kaiserslautern Military Community

Web site: www.westpalzski-club.org

Telephone: 06371-58537

E-mail: kdsowell@interquest.de

Address: PSC 1, Box 611, APO AE 09009

Meetings: 7 p.m. every other Wednesday at The Kneller Haus, Einsiedlerhof

Trips: Jan. 2-8, St. Veit I, \$390 euros, including ski school; Jan. 14-17, Zermatt, Switzerland, \$255 euros; Feb. 18-21, Jungfrau, Switzerland, \$230 euros.

WÜRZBURG INTERNATIONAL SKI CLUB

Telephone: 06109-1181562

E-mail: wsclub@hotmail.com

Web site: www.wsclub.org

Address: WISC, CMR 475, Box 1, APO AE 09036

Meetings: 6 p.m. on first and third Wednesdays of month at Zum Kirschbaum Gasthaus on Würzburgerstr. 18 in Rotten-

dorf. Web site has directions and map.

Trips: Jan. 14-17, Dolomites, Italy, \$220 euros; Feb. 18-21, Verbier, Switzerland, \$220 euros.

Outdoor Recreation

These ski trips were sent to Stars and Stripes by base Outdoor Recreation offices. To add a listing, send it to travel@mail.estripes.osd.mil.

ITALY

VIENZA OUTDOOR RECREATION

Address: Jan. 8 and 29, Feb. 19, March 5 and 26, Oberogen, Italy, Jan. 1 and 15, Feb. 5, March 12 and April 2, San Martino, Italy, Jan. 17, Feb. 12 and March 19, Alleghe, Italy. Sign up the Sunday before the trip. DSN 634-7453.

GERMANY

BAUMHOLTER OUTDOOR RECREATION

Address: Jan. 21-23, Feb. 25-27, March 11-13, Interlaken, Switzerland, \$125 for transportation and equipment rental, hotel lodging \$25 a night, lift passes, two days for 72. Non-skiers welcome on Jan. 6, Black Forest, Feldberg, Germany, \$65 adults, \$45 children; Jan. 14-17, Garmisch, Austria, \$315; Jan. 29-30, Garmisch, Germany, \$195. DSN 485-7162.

DARMSTADT OUTDOOR RECREATION

Address: Dec. 27, Ski Express to Engelberg, Switzerland, \$25 per person for transportation only, price of lift tickets not included. DSN 348-8277.

HANAU OUTDOOR RECREATION

Address: Jan. 8, Ski Express to Engelberg, Switzerland, \$69 for transportation only, price of lift tickets not included. Jan. 13-17, Martin Luther King special weekend trip to the Dolomites, \$239 adults, \$199 children. Cost includes three overnights, breakfast, and dinner, price of lift tickets not included; Jan. 22-23, Black Forest, Germany, \$199 overnight trip.

KAISERSLAUTERN OUTDOOR RECREATION: \$35, ski express to Garmisch, Germany, \$55; Dec. 26, ski express to Feldberg, Germany, \$55. Dec. 30-Jan. 2, Interlaken, Switzerland, \$199 inc. equipment rental and 3 nights

overnight trip, \$109 days of skiing, \$109 adults, \$89 children.

Jan. 28-30, Kaprun, Austria, overnight trip with two days of skiing, \$149 adults, \$99 children. DSN 322-6015 or CIV 06183-516015.

KAISERSLAUTERN OUTDOOR RECREATION:

\$35, ski express to Garmisch, Germany, \$55; Dec. 26, ski express to Feldberg, Germany, \$55. Dec. 30-Jan. 2, Interlaken, Switzerland, \$199 inc. equipment rental and 3 nights

overnight trip, \$109 days of skiing, \$109 adults, \$89 children.

Jan. 28-30, Kaprun, Austria, overnight trip with two days of skiing, \$149 adults, \$99 children. DSN 322-6015 or CIV 06183-516015.

SEE SKI EVENTS, PAGE 33





alpine snow conditions

as of December 20, 2004 *All measurements in centimeters*

Base Resort	Snow Base Top/Bottom	Last Snow	New Snow	Lifts Open	General Information
Cervinia, IT	130/50	12/19	30	12/29	Great skiing thanks to the recent snowfalls
Engelberg, SW	77/20	12/19	15	3/25	Good conditions due to new snow; Runs Closed
Garmisch, GER	130/30	12/20	5	12/34	A dusting of snow has improved the pistes
Hinterhohe, AUS	100/15	12/19	2	15/21	Great skiing due to new snow
Kaprun, AUS	112/54	12/19	10	11/24	Excellent piste conditions
Kauernthal, AUS	130/30	12/20	20	8/9	Much better conditions due to new snow
La Plagne, FR	110/80	12/19	32	46/108	32cm of new snow; slopes are in perfect condition
Les Deux Alpes, FR	70/30	12/19	20	21/54	Great skiing, 20cm of new snow; Runs are closed
Neustift, AUS	100/5	12/19	10	19/24	Much better conditions on and off piste; Runs closed
Passo Tonale, IT	220/70	12/02	0	18/18	Best snow found above mid-station
Pitztal, AUS	120/40	12/10	10	7/7	Great skiing thanks to the recent snowfalls
Saas Fee, SW	210/50	12/20	15	15/22	Brilliant conditions; Resort runs are excellent
Soil, AUS	50/30	12/19	30	38/91	Super slope conditions; some hazards off piste
Tignes, FR	137/72	12/19	35	24/90	Amazing conditions; Resort runs are excellent
Val d'Isère, FR	50/45	12/19	30	39/97	Great skiing due to new snow; Resort runs are good
Val Senales, IT	60/0	11/30	20	7/12	Snow on the slopes is in beautiful condition
Val Thorens, FR	75/43	12/20	30	14/30	Improving conditions thanks to the new snow
Zeil Am See, AUS	55/20	12/18	3	14/26	Snow conditions improving; Resort runs are fair
Zermatt, SW	185/31	12/19	20	20/30	Great snow conditions throughout area

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Outdoor Recreation Ski Schedule

Kaiserslautern-Pölsbach Berne, 489-7751/0631-534-7751
Dec. 20 & Jan. 2 New Year's Ski Weekend Garmisch, Germany
Jan. 1 Ski Express, Jungfrau, Switzerland
Jan. 8 Ski Express, St. Anthony, Austria
Darmstadt Central Federal Reserve 348 6277/04151-49 6277
Jan. 8 Skiing in Engelberg, Switzerland
Mannheim Taylor Bernau, 381-7215/0621-730-7215
Jan. 1 Skiing & Snowboarding
Engelberg, Switzerland
Heidelberg-Pölsbach Berne 388-9022/0621-338-9022
Jan. 8 & 22 Feldberg, Germany

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Tours/Outdoors

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Stars and Stripes

These are Outdoor Recreation tours and events that have been sent to Stripes Travel. If you do not see your base Outdoor Recreation represented, contact it directly.

To add or change a listing, send it via e-mail at least two weeks ahead of the desired publication date to travel@mail.stripsides.com. If you have questions, call (+49) (0) 6155-60-268.

GERMANY

Baumholder Outdoor Recreation: Jan. 15. Paris Express, one-day sightseeing trip, \$85 adults, children to age 15 half price; Feb. 12, Amsterdam Express, one-day sightseeing trip, \$85 adults, children half price, DSN 485-7182 or 06783-6-7182 or go to www.armygerma.com.

Darmstadt Outdoor Recreation: Jan. 28-30. overnight trip to Poland for pottery shopping and visits to numerous other shops, \$25, Feb. 3-6, Carnival in Venice, prices start at \$250 per person, double occupancy; Feb. 26, Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic, one-day trip to the Czech Republic for crystal shopping and visit to dragon market, DSN 348-6277 or CIV 06151-69-6277.

Giessen Outdoor Recreation: Dec. 30-Jan. 2. New Year's Eve in Paris with two hotel nights in the city, \$249 per person, double occupancy, DSN 343-8202, Bldg. 58, Giessen Depot.

Hanan Outdoor Recreation: Dec. 30-Jan. 2. New Year's Eve in Paris with two overnights in the city (cost includes breakfast, sightseeing trip, and New Year's champagne dinner, \$279 adults, \$229 children 4-11, DSN 322-6015 or CIV 06183-516015, Leisure Travel or Adirgoner Kaseme, DSN 322-9891 or CIV 06183-989891).

Kaiserslautern Outdoor Recreation: Jan. 2. spa day, \$35 adults, \$30 children; Jan. 7, after-work spa night, \$30/\$35; Jan. 8, Paris city visit and workshops, \$45; Jan. 16, ice skating, \$20; Jan. 21-23, Paris city visit, \$169; Jan. 30, spa day, \$30 adults, \$35 children; Feb. 26, Rothenburg, Germany folksinger, \$40, DSN 489-7751 or CIV 0651-6-7571.

Kaiserslautern Outdoor Recreation: "One Day Wonder" trips: Jan. 12. Neustadt for crystal shopping; Jan. 13, Bamberg city tour; Jan. 27, ice skating in Nürnberg. Transportation provided free, DSN 467-3225 or CIV 09802-83-3225, BOSS (single soldier) offerings: DSN 468-7638 or CIV 0981-183-636.

Ramstein (KMC) RTT Destinations: Unlimited: Jan. 15 and 30. Rhine Castles, cruise, and wine tasting.



Simone Clarke, who plays the Sugar Plum Fairy in the Christmas production of "The Nutcracker" for the English National Ballet, adjusts her ballet shoes as a member of the Coldstream Guards stands at his post in London. The Duke of York, who is the dance company's patron, hosted a festive tea party to wish the cast luck for the Christmas run. The Nutcracker, which opened Dec. 21, is the first ballet to be performed at the newly refurbished London Coliseum.

\$89; Jan. 14-16, Prague and Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic, \$169; Jan. 22, tour of Cochem Castle and knight's dinner; Jan. 29-30, Brussels and Brugge, \$169; Jan. 22, King Ludwig's castles, \$99.

Flight tours from Frankfurt: **March 13-20,** Moscow and St. Petersburg, 1049 euros includes flight, hotels, overnight train, admissions, tours and lunches; **April 9-16,** Beijing and Xi'an, China, eight days in China with tours of the Great Wall, Forbidden City, Xi'an's Terra Cotta Warriors, and other famous locations. Flight, tours, admissions, many meals and superb shopping, 1329 euros.

For both bus and flight tours, contact DSN 480-5330/489-7064/496-7719, or go to www.RTTTravel.com.

Spanghulden Information, Tickets and Travel: Dec. 30. Jan. 1, Paris, two overnights, \$319 adults; Dec. 30-Jan. 1, Berlin, one overnight, \$195 adults; Dec. 31, Amsterdam Express, \$60; Dec. 31-Jan. 1, Paris, one overnight, \$229; DSN 452-6567 or COMV 06565-61-6567.

Wiesbaden Outdoor Recreation:

Kleber Kaseme, Army In & Out Processing Center, Building 3245, Room 012, DSN 483-7397, CIV 0631-46237, USO Administrative Offices, Plutski Barracks, Building 2913, DSN 489-7233, CIV 0631-536-7233, Tours Office Telephone: DSN 489-7640, CIV 0631-536-7640.

USO Rhein-Neckar (Darmstadt-Heidelberg-Mannheim): Dec. 27 and Jan. 23. Caracalla Terme, Baden-Baden, \$39 includes entry and transportation; Jan. 4, Worms Orientation, \$10; Jan. 8, Evelyn's Wellness Spa, \$5 euros, (with VAT form) for 2.5-hour treatment, plus \$29 transportation; Jan. 11, Mannheim Orientation, \$5; Jan. 13, Spayer Orientation, \$10; Jan. 14, Evelyn's Wellness Spa, with body-draming wrap, 105 euros (with VAT form) for two-hour treatment plus \$29 for transportation; Jan. 14, Jan. 29, Heidelberg orientation, \$10, overnight, cost TBA; Jan. 15, Pane Express, adults \$89, children under 11, \$60; Jan. 15, medieval dinner at Schloss Auerbach, adults \$7.50 euros, children 3-11, 29 euros, not including transportation; Jan. 17, Birkenstock factory and the city of Limburg, \$49; Jan. 18, Lodenburg Orientation, \$10; Jan. 22, Marksburg Castle and Rüdesheim, \$45; Jan. 25, Weinheim orientation, \$10; Jan. 26, shopping in Soufflenheim, France, \$35; Jan. 29, Heidelberg orientation, \$10; Jan. 29, Centro Mail, winter sales at Germany's largest enclosed mall, with more than 200 shops, \$39.

Contact USO Darmstadt at DSN 348-7914; USO Heidelberg at DSN 370-7926; and USO Mannheim at DSN 385-3195.

Italy

USO Naples: Jan. 15-17 (Martin Luther King Day long weekend), Renaissance Weekend in Tuscany, including two nights in Florence and visits to Pisa, Lucca, and Arezzo, 239 euros; Jan. 22-23, countryside weekend with wines of Calabria and visits to historical sites, 135 euros; Feb. 5-6, Treasures of Calabria, including visits to San Giovanni in Fiore and Caccari, 199 euros; Feb. 11-14, Valentine's Day in Paris, including airline, transfers, three

nights in central hotel, and guided tours, 588.00 euros; Feb. 12-13, Sweetest Weekend with overnight in Florence and guided tour, 169 euros (over 18 only); Feb. 19-20, Umbria, with visits to Assisi, Perugia and Denta, 169 euros; Feb. 26-27, Tuscany, including visits to Siena and San Gimignano and wine tasting, 169 euros. One day tours are also offered. Call DSN 626-5713 for details.

USO Rome offers regular tours, including: Roman Holiday, a four-day tour with three nights in a three-star hotel, **Sundays through Wednesdays** (includes four meals and free guided tours; \$439 per person with discounts available); papal audience, **every Wednesday** (free); Super City Tour, featuring the Parthenon, Trevi Fountain and Spanish Steps, **two days a week**; Romanwalk, a three-hour walking tour, **two times a week**; a complete view of Vatican City, **six days a week**; a visit into the ancient Christian catacombs below Rome and to St. Paul's, **twice a week**; van and walking tour of the Colosseum with a walk through the Roman Forum, **four days a week**; Roman After Dark, 7 p.m. **Friday and Saturday**, includes dinner; Monuments of Rome **seven days a week**; Ancient Rome, includes Capitol Hill, Roman Forum, Colosseum, Basilica of St. Paul's outside the Walls, **seven days a week**; Christian Rome catacombs tour, includes Basilica of St. Mary Major, Basilica of St. John in Lateran, the Ancient Appian Way and Catacombs of St. Callistus, **seven days a week**; Illuminated Rome with dinner, **seven days a week**; Illuminated Rome without dinner, **seven days a week**; Capri and Sorrento day trip, includes Naples city tour, Blue Grotto, Anacapri and lunch in Capri, **every day**; Tivoli day tour, **four times a week**.

Call (+39) (0) 6-686-4232 for more info. Check the Web site (www.uso.it) for prices and times.

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SKI EVENTS, FROM PAGE 30

hostel, Dec. 30-Jan. 2, Garmisch, Germany, \$279; Jan. 1, express to Jungfrau, Switzerland, \$55/\$45; Jan. 8, express to St. Anton, Austria, \$55/\$45; Jan. 12, express to Garmisch, Germany, \$55; Jan. 14-17, St. Anton, Austria, \$249 inc. equipment rental and three nights hostel; Jan. 15, express to Engelberg, Switzerland, \$55; Jan. 16, express to Feldberg, Germany, \$45; Jan. 21-23, Lauterbrunnen, Switzerland, \$149; Jan. 21-23, Jan. 22, express to Garmisch, Germany, \$45/\$35; Jan. 26, express to Oberstdorf, Germany, \$45/\$35; Jan. 28-30, St. Moritz, Switzerland, \$185; Jan. 29, express to Jungfrau, Switzerland, \$55/\$45; Feb. 4-6, Garmisch, Germany, \$179; Feb. 5, express to St. Anton, Austria, \$55/\$45; Feb. 9, express to Feldberg, Germany, \$45/\$35; Feb. 11-13, Laax-Films, Switzerland, cost TBA; Feb. 12, express to Engelberg, Switzerland, \$55/\$45; Feb. 18-21, Lauterbrunnen, Switzerland, \$155; Feb. 19, express to Jungfrau, Switzerland, \$55/\$45; Kaiserslautern Outdoor Recreation also offers ski and snow-board repair. DSN 489-7751 or civilian 0631-536-7751.

KATTERBACH OUTDOOR RECREATION: Jan. 8, Garmisch, Germany, Jan. 14-17, Austria; Jan. 29, Garmisch, DSN 467-3225 or CIV 09802-83-3225.

MANNHEIM OUTDOOR RECREATION: Dec. 26, Jan. 1, 15 and 29, Feb. 19 and 26, March 12 and 26 and April 2 and 10, Engelberg, Switzerland, \$50 plus lift; Jan. 8, 17 and 22, Feb. 5, 12 and 19 and March 5 and 19, Feldberg, Germany, \$35 plus lift; Feb. 12, Single Soldier Two-for-One Special to Feldberg (\$35 plus lift); Feb. 21; family ski trip to Feldberg, (\$25 plus lift); March 19, teen ski trip to Feldberg, Mannheim Outdoor Recreation also rents snowboards and performs ski maintenance. DSN 381-7215 or 381-7232, civilian 0621-730-7215 or 0621-730-7232; or civ. 0621-721655. Volunteer ski instructors to teach the basics are needed; call DSN 381-7200.

SPANGDAHLEH OUTDOOR RECREATION: Jan. 7-9, Feb. 18, 20 and March 11-13, Gstaad, \$265 dorms, \$344 doubles, 25-percent discount for children under 12; Jan. 21-23, Feb. 11-13, March 11-13, Feldberg, Germany, \$275 doubles. Reserve one week in advance; children under age 18 must be accompanied by an adult. DSN 406-7170 or CIV 06505-61-7176.

STUTTGART OUTDOOR RECREATION: Dec. 26-Jan. 2, Gstaad, Switzerland, \$620 adults, \$434 for ages 12-16, \$310 for 6-11; Jan. 14-17, St. Gallenkirch, Austria, \$270 adults, \$190 ages 7-14, \$135 up to age 6; Jan. 23-30, Shornried, Switzerland, \$590 adults, \$295 children under age 17; Feb. 5, Garmisch, Germany, \$30 with equipment rental, \$15 without; Feb. 5, March 12 and 18 and April 2, St. Gallenkirch, Austria, \$30 with equipment rental, \$15 without; Feb. 18-21, St. Gallenkirch, Austria, price TBA; April 10-17, St. Gallenkirch, Austria, \$590 adults, \$295 for children under 17. DSN 431-2774.

WIESBADEN OUTDOOR RECREATION: Jan. 8, 15, 29, ski trip to Feldberg, Black Forest, \$45; Jan. 12, ski maintenance clinic, \$15; Jan. 12-15, ski trip to Austria, \$355; Jan. 22, Engelberg, Switzerland, \$55; Jan. 22-23, Feldberg, \$175. DSN 337-5760.

Finding Christmas in Paris

BY SUSAN SPANO

Los Angeles Times

Christmas here is subtle, partly because the city cannot be improved by red bows and tinsel. All year long, electric lights turn the Eiffel Tower into a gigantic Christmas tree and what are Sacre-Coeur, Notre Dame, L'Opera, Les Invalides if not ornaments?

Paris decorates for Christmas in early December, but — so like the French — only in the most tasteful and discreet way. Manger scenes are rare in this insistently secular nation.

I've been searching for Christmas in Paris because this is my first holiday season away from the United States and I don't want to spend it homesick. At a florist on the Left Bank's Rue du Bac market, I found small trees for about \$50 and wreaths for \$40. Then I noticed a pile of cast-off pine boughs heaped in a corner of the shop, which I bought for \$4 and arranged in a vase, aromatic but naked because I didn't bring Christmas ornaments when I moved here in March.

I planned a turkey dinner with all the trimmings — one menu the French haven't perfected — and found what I needed at a shop on the Right Bank that's favored by American expatriates. There were poultry thermometers, aluminum baking dishes, skewers for securing the stuffing inside the turkey — but all shockingly expensive, so I abandoned the project. It simply isn't in me to pay \$12.50 for a box of StoveTop stuffing.

Of course, Christmas justifies shopping, which is always a joy in Paris, particularly because consumerism here is more a matter of quality than quantity; one buys fewer but better gifts. And, for once, French merchants, who routinely lock their doors for several hours at lunchtime, catch the commercial spirit by opening on Sundays.

I bought several small boxes of choice sweets at La Maison du Chocolat on the Rue de Sevres, where the salespeople wear gloves while handling pralines



AP photos

A Ferris wheel of lights frames a statue of the Tuileries Gardens on the Place de la Concorde in Paris.

and truffles. Alas, the spell was broken when the saleswoman got an anonymous dirty call from a pervert who telephones the shop regularly.

"If he ever comes in, I'll recognize his voice and God help him," she said.

Warts like that bring Paris to life for me. With the temperature in the 40s, fragile Parisians complain, and a bum has taken to sleeping in the foyer of my apartment building. A French friend who visited me said, "At least he knows a good address when he sees one."

I love bundling up and walking under a milky winter sky. Old women are wearing fur coats that look as though they've been under wraps since the reign of Pepin the Short.

Knee-length boots with spindly heels are in style and, as it turns out, French men are just as adept at the art of scarf-tying as French women, though silk has yielded to wool in the cold weather.

One afternoon, with my Christmas shopping finished, I strolled across the Pont des Arts, from the Left Bank to the Right, then wended my way among narrow streets north of the Rue de Rivoli, headed for the Pompidou Centre. Inside Paris' striking modern art museum, I found a uniquely French holiday exhibition of Christmas trees created by top couturiers and designers.

Versace's tree was made of red net and roses. Chanel's was shaped like a perfume bottle, with a video monitor instead of a label showing the company's new ad featuring Nicole Kidman. But my favorite entry was a pair of red high heels, with bushy Christmas tree pompons at the toes, by Bruno Frisoni.

From there I walked toward the Place Vendôme, hoping to find Christmas lights on the 130-foot column there. Instead, the Swiss tourism bureau had decorated the elegant square with huge silver ornaments.

Later I joined crowds of children with eyes fixed on Christmas windows at Printemps and Galeries Lafayette, two big French department stores on the Boulevard Haussmann. Another day, I saw the tiny skating rink set up for the holidays on the first level of the Eiffel Tower and then attended a Christmas concert at the American Church on the Quai d'Orsay, where little girls in red velvet dresses wan-

dered the aisles during a hand-bell rendition of "Angels We Have Heard on High."

So I have found a taste of Christmas. Still, I'm sitting in my apartment with my nose pressed to the window, wishing I could spend the holidays in the States, where they know Santa will never come unless someone puts lights in the front yard and chocolate chip cookies on the mantel.

Of course, Christmas justifies shopping, which is always a joy in Paris.



AP photos

A boy watches as a giant Christmas tree is set up inside a Paris department store.

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Calendar

COMPILED BY
JAYNE TRÄENDLY

Special to Stars and Stripes

Listings are the latest information available at press time, but are subject to change. We recommend checking with the local tourist board to confirm details of the event before traveling.

AUSTRIA

www.austria-info.at
OBERNDORF: Christmas market through Dec. 31.
VIENNA: Imperial ball, Dec. 31; Flower ball, Jan. 14; Technologists' ball, Jan. 14; Economics University ball, Jan. 15; Vienna Philharmonic ball, Jan. 20; Army officers' ball, Jan. 21; Pharmacists' ball, Jan. 22; Engineers' ball, Jan. 27; Physicians' ball, Jan. 29; Hunters' ball, Jan. 31; Opera ball, Feb. 3; Viennese coffee house owners' ball, Feb. 2; Bonbon ball, Feb. 4; Lawyers' ball, Feb. 5; Rudolfina masked ball, Feb. 7; Johann Strauss ball, March 19.
VIENNA: Dream on ice, Jan. 21.
March 6: Ice skating in front of the City Hall.

BELGIUM

www.visitbelgium.com
LIEGE: Christmas market through Dec. 30.
BRUSSELS: Christmas market on Marche aux Poissons and Place St. Catherine, through Jan. 21.
BRUGES: Christmas market through Jan. 21.
BRUSSELS: Brussels on ice, through Jan. 3. Ice shows and skating on Marche aux Poissons square.
ANTWERP: Ice skating on market square through Jan. 8.
ANTWERP: Snow and ice sculpture festival, through Jan. 16.
BRUSSELS: Antiques show, Jan. 21-30.
Tour & Taxis.
BRUSSELS: Celebration of 175th anniversary, throughout the year.

CZECH REPUBLIC

www.czechtourism.com
PRAGUE: Christmas market through Jan. 6.

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People stroll next to giant Christmas ornaments, including a tree in the plastic bubble, in the middle of the Place Vendôme in Paris last week. The prestigious square, famous for luxury-goods shops, will glitter with Christmas decorations until Jan. 5.

DENMARK

www.visitdenmark.com
COPENHAGEN: Opening of the city opera, Jan. 15.

ENGLAND

www.visitbritain.com
ALNWICK: Christmas market, marketplace, through Dec. 31.
SWANSEA: Christmas market through Dec. 31.
WARWICK CASTLE: Medieval fair, through Jan. 3 (fee charged).
LONDON: Parade, Jan. 1.
YORK: Stamp and coin fair, Jan. 14-15.
Racecourse.
LONDON: Daily telegraph adventure travel and sports show, Jan. 14-16.
Olympia.
SPALDING: Motorbike 2005, Jan. 15-16.
LONDON: International mime festival, Jan. 15-30.
LONDON: Vivaldefrance, Jan. 21-23.
French travel and lifestyle show in Olympia.
LONDON: Vivo Espana, Jan. 28-30.
Spanish travel and lifestyle show in Olympia.
LONDON: Motorcycle show, Jan. 29-Feb. 6.
Alexandra Palace.
LONDON: Daily Telegraph Destinations: Holiday and Travel Show, Feb. 3-6.
Earls Court.

FRANCE

www.france tourism.com
AOX EN PROVENCE: Christmas market through Dec. 31.
LA FERTE ST. AUBIN: Christmas market throughout December.
LOIRRAINE: Christmas market through Dec. 31.
NICE: Christmas market through Jan. 2.
STRASBOURG: Christmas market through Dec. 31.
TOULOUSE: Christmas market through December.
TROYES: Christmas market through Dec. 31.
PARIS: Annual winter store sales, Jan. 12-mid-February.
THROUGHOUT the country: Various Epiphany celebrations, Jan. 15-26.
MENTON: Lemon festival, Feb. 12-27.

Best bets

This year is the anniversary of the four-mile pilgrimage walk from Ripon, England, to Fountain Abbey. This year it falls on Sunday. The walk retraces the steps of the 13 Cistercian monks who founded the abbey on St. Stephen's Day in 1132. A church service will be held in the Ripon cathedral at 10 a.m. The walk begins outside the church at 10:45 a.m. and ends with carol singing, mulled wine and mince pies.

— JAYNE TRÄENDLY

NICE: Carnival, Feb. 12-27.
PARIS: City marathon, April 10.

GERMANY

www.germany-tourism.de
MUNICH: Tollwood, through Dec. 31.
MUNICH: International motorcycle show, Jan. 21-23.
TODTMOS: Dog sled races, Jan. 29-30.
SINSEIM: Motorcycle exhibition, Feb. 2-13.
Exhibition center.
BERLIN: International motorcycle show, Feb. 4-6.
Fairgrounds.
KÖLN: Carnival parade, Feb. 7.
DUSSELDORF: Carnival parade, Feb. 7.
MAINZ: Carnival parade, Feb. 7.

ITALY

www.italiantourism.com
BRESSANONE: Christmas market through Jan. 8.
MERANO: Christmas market through Jan. 7.
ROMA: Novena Christmas market, through Jan. 6.
Piazza Navona.
VERONA: Christmas cribs in the arena, through Jan. 25.
ROME: New Year's Eve on the Piazza del Popolo, Dec. 31-Jan. 1.
THROUGHOUT the country: Various Epiphany celebrations, Jan. 6.
VENICE: Epiphany witches on the canal race, Jan. 6.

VIAREGGIO: Carnival, Jan. 23-Feb. 13.
VENICE: Carnival, Jan. 28-Feb. 8.

THE NETHERLANDS

www.holland.com/uk
MAASTRICHT: Christmas market through Dec. 31.
ROTTERDAM: International film festival, through Jan. 2.
MAASTRICHT: Winterland festival, through Jan. 8.
Ice skating on city square.
APPELDOORN: Midwinter marathon, Jan. 29.
LANEIJUK: Carnival, Feb. 22-26.

POLAND

www.cracow-life.com
KRAKOW: Christmas market through Dec. 29.

SCOTLAND

www.visitscotland.com
EDINBURGH: Hogmanay, Dec. 29-Jan. 1.
CRIFE: Corrie Hogmanay flambeaux procession, Dec. 31-Jan. 1.
THROUGHOUT the country: Burns Night, Jan. 25.

SPAIN

www.tourspain.co.uk
SAN SEBASTIAN: Tamborrada, Jan. 19-20.
THROUGHOUT the country: Holy Week, March 20-27.

SWEDEN

www.visit-sweden.com
KIRUNA (Norrbotten): Snow festival, Jan. 27-30.
Biggest in Europe.
JÖKKÖCK (Norrbotten): Winter market, Feb. 3-6.
Lapp.

SWITZERLAND

www.switzerlandtourism.ch
BASEL: Coin fair, Feb. 11-13.
GENEVA: International car show, March 5-13.

WALES

www.visitwales.co.uk
LLANWRITTY WELLS: New Year walk in, Dec. 31-Jan. 1.

Let's Go

BY JAYNE TRÄENDLY
Stripes Travel researcher

Wine tasting in Paris

Become more knowledgeable about French wines next time you're in Paris at a wine tasting organized by O Chateau.

Given in English, the tastings are held in Parisian locations, including La Petite Cour, in St-Germain-des-Près; La Brasserie du Pont Louis-Philippe on the Right Bank of the Seine; and le Cellier Saint-Paul, a 14th-century cellar in Le Marais.

The price starts at 39 euros and include the wine, glasses, fresh French bread and instructions. They are either centered on a pre-selected theme or customized to individual tastes.

Some of the themes are "French Wine Discovery" (the art of tasting wine), "Plaisirs du Vin" (the diversity of French vineyards), "BBC" (selections of the wine from Bordeaux, Bourgogne, Champagne), "Cheese and Wine" (cheese with appropriate wine), and "Champagne" (everything you want to know about the bubbly wine).

For info and reservations, go to www.o-chateau.com.

British bits

• The Bronte Parsonage Museum in Haworth, West Yorkshire, will commemorate the 150th anniversary of Charlotte Brontë's death with an exhibition Feb. 1 to Dec. 31. It will include her letters, manuscripts and costumes. The museum Web site is www.bronte.org.uk.

• Want to trace your British ancestry? The National Archives, based at Kew in West London, has put together a guide to www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/familyhistory. "Family History, the Basic and Beyond" includes important sources for research and tips on how to best use them.

• Britain has a 2,000-mile network of canals, lakes and navigable rivers within its borders that attract visitors every year. To guide them along the way, Waterscape.com has produced a new brochure, "Enjoy Britain's Waterscape" with suggestions for vacations and activities such as boating, angling, walking and cycling. The brochure is free from VisitBritain offices outside of Britain. Or check www.waterscape.com.

• Also free from offices outside Britain is the new pocket-sized handbook for travelers 18 to 30 years: "Experience Britain, Do It Your Way." It contains information on 14 cities (including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Cardiff), general practical tips, sports, music, literature, fashion and calendar of events. For more, go to www.visitbritain.com/nov.

• Have a question about visiting Britain? You may find the answer at www.uk.com. The government site has answers to 300 frequently asked questions, as well feature articles.

Send items for consideration to travel@mail.stripes.osd.mil.



AFRTS Television Schedule

Updated sports listings are available on the first Screenshot page in the sports section or AFRTS Web site at <http://myafn.dodmedia.osd.mil>

Thursday, December 23, 2004

AFN-FAMILY		AFN-MOVIE	AFN-EUROPE	AFN-KOREA	AFN-NEWS	AFN-SPORTS	SPECTRUM	AFN-PACIFIC
9:00	The Wild Thornberrys	Movie *** "The Story Lady" (1991, Drama) Jessica Jandy. A retired widow's low social-consciousness is a hit.	Dr. Phil	Jacquard Headline News	Nightline Navy/Marine Corps News	NBA Basketball teams to be Announced.	30-Minute Meals	Jacquard Headline News
9:30	The Wild Thornberrys							
10:00	ChalkZone (E)		(9:48) Oprah Winfrey (10:35) Guiding Light	ESPNNews Advisory Block	Hardball With Chris Matthews		Design on a Dime	ESPNNews
10:30	ChalkZone							
11:00	Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius	(10:48) Movie *** "The Runaway" (1999, Horror) Robert Finkelstein, Rachel Weisz, John Pammart.	(11:17) General Hospital Judge Judy	Two and a Half Men CSI: Crime Scene Investigation 20/20	The O'Reilly Factor	World Sport	Style Star ER News Live	Pacific Report Two and a Half Men
11:30	Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius						The King of Queens	Wheel of Fortune
12:00	Kim Possible "Number One"	Movie *** "Sleepless in Seattle" (1998, Romantic Comedy) Tom Hanks, Meg Ryan, Bill Pullman.	Today Clay Aiken, George Clooney.	Pacific Report	Fox and Friends	SportsCenter	That '70s Show	To Be Announced
12:30	Kim Possible "Mind Games"		Headline News	The Tonight Show			Girlfriends "Merry X-mas"	CSI: Crime Scene Investigation "20/20"
13:00	Planet's Funniest Animals	Movie *** "Atlantis: The Lost Empire" (2001) Voices of Michael J. Fox, James Garner.	Today Clay Aiken, George Clooney.	CSI: Crime Scene Investigation 20/20	Fox and Friends		Charm'd The sisters' night-night comes to life.	Pacific Report
13:30	Movie *** "Atlantis: The Lost Empire" (2001) Voices of Michael J. Fox, James Garner.		Legend of Tarzan Aaahh! Real Monsters	Late Show	American Morning	SportsCenter	Any Day Now "It's Not Karma, It's Life"	The Tonight Show
14:00	Funniest Home Videos	(2:54) Movie *** "The Fugitive" (1993) Harrison Ford. An innocent man must evade the law as he pursues a killer.	Sabrina, the Animated Series Nick News Special Edition	Access Hollywood			ER "No Strings Attached"	Late Show
14:30	Full House "Gotta Dance"		Headline News		CNN Live Today	NFL Game of the Week		Access Hollywood
15:00	Pokemon		Jacquard Headline News			SportsCenter	Law & Order "Ramparts"	Headline News
15:30	Yu-Gi-Oh!	Showbiz Moms & Dads	Jacquard Headline News				The Late Show	The Late Show
16:00	Aaahh! Real Monsters		Destinations		FOX News	NBA Basketball Teams to Be Announced.	The Simpsons "C.E. D'Oh"	Dennis Miller
16:30	Rocket Power	Short-Movies	Entertainment Tonight	AFN Evening News	FOX News		Everybody Loves Raymond	Sundays
17:00	SpongeBob SquarePants	Movie *** "Secret Santa" (2003, Christmas) Jamie Gertz. A cynical reporter searches for a mysterious philanthropist.	Will & Grace To Be Announced	Countdown With Keith Olsen Entertainment Studios.com	FOX News			Countdown With Keith Olsen Entertainment Studios.com
18:00	Rugrats		Headline News				The Practice "Final Judgment" - Elmer fights for a death row inmate.	Headline News
19:00	Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer		Headline News		Studio B With Shepard Smith	NBA Basketball: NBA Highlights, analysis, looks.	The Hot List	The Hot List
20:00	7th Heaven "Stand Up"	(4:48) Movie *** "Les Misérables" (1998) Liam Neeson. A French fugitive is pursued by an obsessed police officer.	Headline News	Good Morning America	Your World With Neil Cavuto	First and Ten	Friends	Good Morning America
21:00	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch		Headline News		NFL Live	Seinfeld "The Wizard"	The Daily Show	
21:30	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch		The Tonight Show		Lester Holt Live	Around the Horn	Blind Date	
22:00	The Cozy Show		Late Show					
22:30	Home Improvement	Movie *** "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (1981)						
23:00	Touched by an Angel "Doodlebug"							
23:30								
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2004								
00:00	Aaahh! Real Monsters	(11:00) Movie *** "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (1981)	(11:30) Late Show	Play With Me Sesame Bear in the Big Blue House	Headline News NBC Nightly News	SportsCenter	Late Night	Play With Me Sesame Bear in the Big Blue House
00:30	Rocket Power		Access Hollywood					
1:00	SpongeBob SquarePants	(1:10) Movie *** "The Postman Always Rings Twice" (1981, Drama) Jack Nicholson, Jessica Lange, John Cusack.	College Basketball: Richmond vs. Pittsburgh.	Clifford the Big Red Dog (E) Wheel of Fortune	ABC World News Tonight CBS Evening News		Summerland	Clifford the Big Red Dog (E)
1:30	Rugrats			Dr. Phil	NBC Evening News	(1:15) NBA Basketball: Minnesota Timberwolves at San Antonio Spurs. From the SBC Center in San Antonio, (Live)	The Practice "Final Judgment" - Elmer fights for a death row inmate.	Dr. Phil
2:00	Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer		College Basketball: Providence vs. Memphis. (Live)	Oprah Winfrey	Hannity & Colmes			Oprah Winfrey
2:30	7th Heaven "Stand Up"	Movie *** "Secret Santa" (2003, Christmas) Jamie Gertz. A cynical reporter searches for a mysterious philanthropist.		NBC Nightly News	Headline News		Friends	NBC Nightly News
3:00	3:30			Judge Judy	Nightly Business Report	NBA Basketball: Miami Heat at Sacramento Kings. From AFCC Arena in Sacramento, Calif. (Live)	Seinfeld "The Wizard"	Judge Judy
4:00	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch			NBC Nightly News	Low Dobs Tonight		Breathless Yoga	Access Hollywood
4:30	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch			Nightly Business Report	(2:55) Guiding Light		Caribbean Workout	(2:55) Guiding Light
5:00	Sesame Street (E)	(4:48) Movie *** "Les Misérables" (1998) Liam Neeson. A French fugitive is pursued by an obsessed police officer.	Headline News	Access Hollywood	(1:31) General Hospital	Larry King Live	Body Shaping	(1:31) General Hospital
5:30	Barney & Friends (E)		Headline News	Clifford the Big Red Dog (E)			The View	Teacher's Pet (E)
6:00	Blue's Clues "Santa's News"		Headline News	Clifford the Big Red Dog (E)			What's a New Scooby-Do?	Ozzy & Dixie
6:30	Dragon Tales (E)	Showbiz Moms & Dads	Play With Me Sesame Bear in the Big Blue House	Ozzy & Dixie	BET Nightly News	SportsCenter	Emeril Live	The Brothers Garcia
7:00	Bob the Builder	Short-Movies	Clifford the Big Red Dog (E)	Wheel of Fortune	The Brothers Garcia	College Football: Miami College at Fort Worth State - Cincinnati vs. Marshall. From Fort Worth, Texas. (Taped)	Burt Wolf: Taste of Freedom	Easy Entertaining-Chiaroelli
7:30	Elmo's World: Happy Holiday Days!		Headline News	Headline News	Headline News		Decorating Cents	Headline News
8:00	Stanley	Movie *** "A Season for Miracles" (1999) Carla Gugino. A woman gives her laid-off sister's children a real Christmas.	(9:48) Oprah Winfrey (10:35) Guiding Light	Headline News	Hardball With Chris Matthews		The Look for Less	Pacific Report
8:30	Movie "It's a Very Merry Muppet Christmas Movie" (2002, Comedy) Whoozie Goldburg. Santa Claus is coming to town.		Headline News	Headline News	The O'Reilly Factor		How-Grinch Stole Christmas	Movie *** "It's a Wonderful Life" (1946, Fantasy)
9:00	Movie "It's a Very Merry Muppet Christmas Movie" (2002, Comedy) Whoozie Goldburg. Santa Claus is coming to town.		Headline News	Headline News	PrimeTime Thursday		That '70s Show	Movie *** "It's a Wonderful Life" (1946, Fantasy)
10:00	Santa Claus is Coming to Town		Headline News	Headline News	Fox and Friends	College Football: Pioneer vs. UCLA vs. Wyoming. From Las Vegas. (Taped)	Girlfriends	Charm'd "The Day the Magic Went Away"
11:00	Stanley	(10:54) Movie *** "American Graffiti" (1973) Richard Dreyfuss. Teenagers in 1962 California ponder their futures.	(11:17) General Hospital Judge Judy	Pacific Report	Fox and Friends		The "Day the Magic Went Away"	Pacific Report
11:30	Dora the Explorer		Headline News	Headline News	American Morning		Any Day Now M.E. holds out for a not-a-very-perfect	Late Show
12:00	The Wiggles	Movie *** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947, Comedy) Maureen O'Hara. Macy's first Christmas.	Teacher's Pet (E) What's a New Scooby-Do?	Late Show	CNN Live Today	SportsCenter	ER "A Boy Falling Out of the Sky"	Access Hollywood
13:00	Mickey's Christmas Carol		Ozzy & Dixie				Law & Order "Haven"	Headline News
13:30	Movie *** "Miracle on 34th Street" (1947, Comedy) Maureen O'Hara. Macy's first Christmas.		Headline News				The Simpsons	The Late Show
14:00	Funniest Home Videos	(2:47) Movie *** "Parent Trap" (1999) Drew Barrymore. A misadventure of the pressures of raising children.	Headline News		FOX News	Inside the NFL	The Simpsons	The Late Show
14:30	Full House		Headline News				Everybody Loves Raymond	Dennis Miller
15:00	Pokemon		Headline News		PrimeTime Thursday	ESPNNews	Charm'd "Crimes and Misdemeanors"	Countdown With Keith Olsen
15:30	Yu-Gi-Oh!	Faith Hill Revealed	Headline News		Fox and Friends	NFL Live	Boston Public "Chapter Forty"	Countdown With Keith Olsen
16:00	Jetsons' Christmas Carol		Headline News		American Morning	NFL Game of the Week	Headline News	Entertainment Studios.com
17:00	Christmas Firsttime		Headline News		CNN Live Today		ER "A Boy Falling Out of the Sky"	Good Morning America
17:30	Rugrats Christmas in a Mountain Cabin		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
18:00	A Scooby-Doo Christmas		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
18:30	Barbie in the Nutcracker		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
19:00	A Scooby-Doo Christmas		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
20:00	Barbie in the Nutcracker		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
21:00	Movie *** "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (2000, Jim Carrey). The evil Grinch plots to ruin Christmas in Whoville.		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
21:30	Movie *** "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (2000, Jim Carrey). The evil Grinch plots to ruin Christmas in Whoville.		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
22:00	Home Improvement		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
22:30	Home Improvement		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
23:00	Home Improvement		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America
23:30	Home Improvement		Headline News				The Simpsons	Good Morning America

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Princess Diana and Prince Charles

Collectors snatch up royal goods

Collectors of royal family memorabilia bought a 23-year-old piece of wedding cake and magnum of champagne from the marriage of Princess Diana and Prince Charles on Friday.

A royal fanatic paid more than \$2,000 for the magnum of French champagne from the 1981 royal wedding, while a slice of matured wedding cake sold for \$452.

The 1961 vintage Dom Perignon chosen for the year of Diana's birth — was one of 12 magnums bottled in a limited edition for the royal wedding.

It failed to sell at auction earlier this week, but the collector from northern England called the auction house Friday and agreed to pay \$2,028 for the bubbly.

Charles and Diana were divorced in 1996. Diana died in a car crash in Paris the following year.

Brolin cited for domestic battery

Actor Josh Brolin was cited for misdemeanor domestic battery over the weekend after his wife, actress Diane Lane, called police during an argument at the couple's home.

Brolin, the son of actor James Brolin and stepson of Barbra Streisand, was arrested at 3 a.m. Sunday and released on \$20,000 bail. Frank Mateljan, a spokesman for the city attorney's office, said Monday. The city attorney is reviewing the case and no charges have been filed, he said. Domestic battery is a misdemeanor, Mateljan said.

Kelly Bush, the couple's spokeswoman, said the incident was a "misunderstanding" and the couple had reconciled.

Indie producer sues DiCaprio, Maguire

Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire have been sued by a producer who claims the two actors blocked distribution of a 1995 independent film they starred in.

John Schindler says the actors warned potential distributors that DiCaprio wouldn't work with them on other projects if they released "Don't Plum," a low-budget, black-and-white film about a group of friends hanging out at a diner.

The Superior Court complaint, filed Friday, claims they wrongly denied the movie was meant for commercial release and seeks \$38 million and unspecified damages.

Messages left with DiCaprio's publicist, Ken Sunshine, and Maguire's publicist, Kelly Bush, weren't immediately returned Monday.

In 1999, DiCaprio and Maguire settled a \$10 million lawsuit with another producer who accused them of using DiCaprio's superstar status to prevent the movie's release.

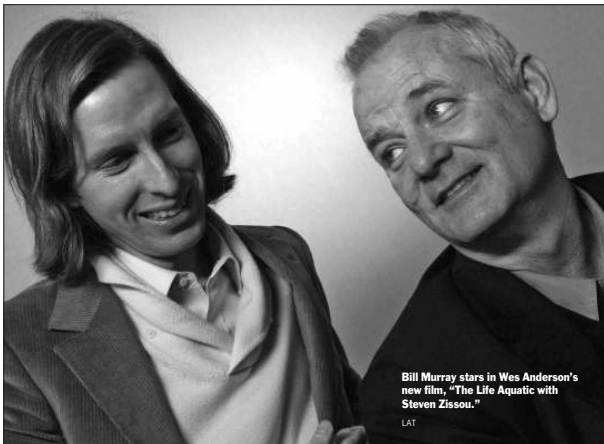
The actors have said they made the film as a "favor to a friend" and did so under the agreement that it would never be promoted as a feature-length movie.

Springsteen show nets \$100K for charity

Once again, The Boss gave a boost to the seaside city where he rose to rock 'n' roll fame.

Bruce Springsteen performed two sold-out benefit concerts at a downtown Asbury Park tavern Sunday, raising about \$100,000 for local charities, and urged fans to support the city, which is emerging from decades of decline. Merchants also credited Springsteen with boosting business by offering 10 people a pair of free tickets, along with the chance to meet him backstage, by entering a drawing that required them to visit an Asbury Park store. The holiday benefits have become a tradition for Springsteen, a Freehold native who now lives in Rumson. Like Asbury Park, all the towns are in Monmouth County.

Stories and photos from The Associated Press



Bill Murray stars in Wes Anderson's new film, "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou."

LAT

Bill Murray: Middle-aged muse

Actor finds critical success as inspiration to Wes Anderson

BY RACHEL ABRAMOWITZ
Los Angeles Times

Muses are most often thought of as comely, lithe and young. Throughout history, they've usually been depicted as female guides to inner wisdom that spark the imaginations of great men. But for director Wes Anderson, whose loopy reimagining of the filmmaking experience, "The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou," opens this week, the muse has recently taken the form of a middle-aged man with faintly pockmarked skin, tufts of graying hair and sad, teardrop eyes — the comedian Bill Murray.

In fact, he's standing at the exact spot where the two first met eight or so years ago.

The two have just spent an afternoon junketeering with the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. It's the beginning of the pre-Oscar Christmas rush, where filmmakers and stars spin through special insider screenings in all the places where Hollywood tastemakers might congregate. Murray, who keeps an 800 number — which he never answers — for dealing with the business, isn't a common sight on the publicity circuit.

Yet here he is — affable and genially uninhibited, in a blue blazer, blue sweater and gray pants. When it's time to sit down, he is almost courtly, pulling out the chair for a reporter and helping with her coat.

Although he's the same height as the 6-foot-11 Murray, Anderson seems half that size. He's thin like a stretched-out rubber band. At 35, he seems like a precocious kid wearing his dad's suit.

Drinks with the pair, who first teamed in 1998's "Rushmore," and one of "Aquatic's" producers, Barry Mendel, has an amiable, off-kilter quality, a semi-ironic jag through an interview process that Anderson in fact lampoons with relish in "Aquatic." As in a Wes Anderson film, the surreal quality is softened by warmth, born here by the

real affection between wunderkind director and his world-weary yet jaunty star.

Anderson, after all, enticed Murray to spend six months in Italy for less than his customary fee, to play Zissou, a narcissistic and broke oceanographer (Jacques Cousteau on a very bad day) who drags his band of misfits, his mistrustful brainy wife (Anjelica Huston), a pregnant journalist (Cate Blanchett) and a Southern pilot who might be his long-lost son (Owen Wilson) on a quixotic search for the mythical jaguar shark that ate his best friend.

Ask Murray about his recent career reblossoming — with his adoption by two of the leading young filmmakers of this generation, Anderson and Sofia Coppola — and he deadpans, with flirtatious faux naïveté. "I'm an adult now. I'm not an ingenue anymore." Pressed, he answers more seriously. "I know why they've asked me. It's because I haven't really embarrassed myself. I don't think I've ruined myself, and I don't think Wes has, either. I'm not over-acted. If you can do funny things, you can do serious things, too. I can do whatever's required."

Anderson, who has worked with the precision of a short-story writer, has been unleashed structurally as well as financially with "The Life Aquatic."

He's made a picaresque opera, a Don Quixote-esque saga that costs in the neighborhood of \$50 million, more than twice the price of his last film, "The Royal Tenenbaums," which earned \$52 million at the domestic box office. For the Walt Disney Co., which financed the film, this is certainly a nervy move.

The director, who's been monitoring the clock on his cell phone, leaves. The topic shifts, the way these conversations go, to the man who just left the room. Has success changed Anderson? "Everyone changes a little bit when they have success and celebrity," says Murray, sounding like a grizzled eyewitness to that perpetual battle between ego and gratification.

Has Murray's own recent artistic success changed him? The actor seems genuinely pleased to be a part of Anderson's "oeuvre," just as he was to be part of Coppola's success last year with "Lost in Translation." Though he didn't win the best actor Oscar, "I didn't care," he says.

"Honestly, I think I was in the best film of the year," he says, over the last sips of wine. "I loved my movie. That was the prize."

STARS AND STRIPES LETTERS TO THE EDITOR/OPINION

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Compassionate acts continue

Sixty years ago, my quiet town was in the last stages of war.

On Dec. 24, the town was reduced to rubble by an American bombing campaign. Most people that I hear talk about that period were children hiding in the country. It was a very difficult life following the war, but relief packages provided by Americans helped them survive.

Acts of kindness, mercy and compassion for the defenseless civilian casualties of war were some of the best characteristics of American people that now-prosperous adult Germans mention.

It is still dark at 7:15 this morning. I have the seven-light electric candles that decorate so many German and Swedish homes lighting my kitchen. The small, white lights that decorate the houses and yards are shining brightly against the fog that has frozen on spider webs, draping doorways and windows with the finest natural garland. I take some comfort in being able to sit in a warm kitchen in a peaceful village as I contemplate the aftermath of war.

I believe that the compassionate acts of the post-World War II American soldiers and civilians planted seeds of good will that continue to bear fruit today.

It is hard to think of any American (especially those who work overseas in military communities) who does not have a relative, neighbor or co-worker with a relative now fighting in the war against terror. Our soldiers in Iraq continue to try to meet the needs of children through school renovation, drives to get school supplies and toys, and efforts to bring peace and democratic rule to their land. I hope that in 60 years elderly Iraqis will have tales of their wartime childhood and the compassionate citizens of the world who came to their aid.

Susan K. Kerns

Bittburg-Moetsch, Germany

Tell us what you think

Stars and Stripes welcomes your comments on editorials and columns that are published in the newspaper, and values letters on topics of importance to the lives of our readers. All letters must be signed, and must include the writer's address or base and telephone number. Please limit all letters to 300 words. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, taste and clarity.

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Don't give him any medals

A specialist chastised a few folks who've been serving honorably for good news-knows-how-long as being somewhat un-American for taking a stand against stop loss ("Serving past your ETS," letter, Dec. 13).

The next day's issue had a letter from another specialist who observed that medals are being awarded according to rank, not merit ("Bronze Stars not deserved," Dec. 14).

Well, I've been serving in Iraq for almost a year now and there are a few observations I'd like to make: To the first letter writer: It's those soldiers' right to peacefully protest the government. To the second letter writer: Well-spoiled, brother! It's so refreshing when folks have the gumption to point out some of the many inequities in today's "all volunteers" Army.

After years of active duty, and after being forced to stay past my unexpired time in service date, I've become nothing short of heart sick at the way things are. So go ahead

and call me "unpatriotic," or "a coward," or underserving of your mom's apple pie. If I'm such an awful soldier, then we all should be in agreement that I never should have been kept in an Army post my ETS date.

I had to attend a formation last month where a captain was awarded the Bronze Star because she sat behind a desk for 10 months. Forget it, specialists. The only way you'll be awarded a Bronze Star is if you catch a rocket-propelled grenade launched at a general and throw it back.

You can all keep any medals you had in mind for me. The only stamp of approval I want comes on my cleaning papers.

Sp. Peter S. Green
Camp Victory, Baghdad

AAFES gas can be cheaper

I would like to address the Army and Air Force Exchange Service gas prices.

I know for a fact that AAFES can sell a gallon of gas at a cheaper price, almost 75 cents a gallon cheaper.

I did my research and found the only state paying such high prices, other than Hawaii, was California. The national average as of Dec. 12 is \$1.87 per gallon, with Ohio having the cheapest at \$1.47 per gallon.

At even \$1.87 per gallon, AAFES is making a huge profit. But it sees fit to charge us more, much more.

Yes, I agree that AAFES is a ripoff when it comes to gas, but we are held hostage as not to pay more than one euro per liter. AAFES knows we won't buy off base unless absolutely necessary.

Did I mention the low quality? I constantly have to use an additive in the gas and that's another \$5 or more.

As for the people who have the gall to say: "If you don't like it, buy it off base," I say: stick a sock in it. We can keep hounding AAFES to treat us right, and someday it may happen.

Don't insult me and say the higher price is to even [out] the cost of other goods. You aren't getting that lie past me.

Teach. Sgt Matt Andrews
Ramstein Air Base, Germany

Perverting a professional practice?

The Providence (R.I.) Journal

A number of women have come forward to complain about being sexually harassed in airport places. The problem is that security guards in front of other passengers. New York real-estate lawyer Rhonda Gynier said an agent used an open hand to touch her shoulders, under her arms, around her neck, and over her breasts. "I've never been so humiliated in all my life," she said. Other women say they are now avoiding flying whenever possible.

The post-9/11 attacks are the result of a directive issued by the Transportation Security Administration on Sept. 22, after two plane crashes in Russia. Authorities speculated that Chechen women may have smuggled

nonmetallic explosives, undetected by standard airport machines, under their clothing. Guards are supposed to use the back of their hands to search travelers they believe could be smuggling explosives.

Safety is the reason for the new pat-downs, but some wonder whether poorly paid and ill-trained security guards are using the directive as a means to get some cheap thrills at the expense of women. And they wonder why there are not more female agents available to do the touching.

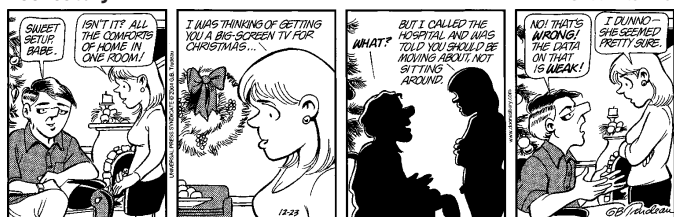
It is a disarming trend that, thanks to the work of terrorists, air travel and human dignity are becoming mutually exclusive. People already subject themselves to orders by officious guards; the removal of shoes, belts, jackets and jewelry; and long delays and

snaking lines for the metal detectors at airports that once upon a time made travel quick, pleasant and convenient. And wait until the imaging machines being tested at some airports — which expose a picture of the traveler's nude body under his or her clothing, leaving nothing to the imagination — come into wider use.

We seem to be willing to make such trade-offs to be safer. But the government owes us something in return: well-trained guards who know what they are doing and are not recruited from the ranks of criminals; enough female guards to inspect female travelers; harsh action against any guards who are clearly trying to get their sexual kicks on the job; and a better effort to target those who pose the greatest risks for the greatest degree of inspection.

Doonesbury

BY GARRY TUEDEU



OPINION

Pins on our lapels and hearts on our sleeves

BY RICK ATKINSON

One morning in 1966, when I was an eighth-grader at Gen. George S. Patton Jr. Junior High School at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., we were mustered onto the playground in a formation of huge black letters that spelled: WE BACK YOU. A helicopter appeared overhead, and a photographer leaned from the cockpit. The subsequent photograph, published in a newspaper, was meant to inspire the troops in Vietnam.

As the sons and daughters of professional Army officers, our impulse was to close ranks and stand where we were told to stand. For us the affirmation was not political, it was personal. We tried not to confuse the warriors with the war.

Yet over the years as the war dragged on, the dead stacked up and the country splintered, that distinction became harder to sustain. The suspicion that our soldiers were risking their lives in a bad, lost cause soon became so searing that many of us insisted the war was righteous and winnable. To admit otherwise felt like a betrayal of those we loved; it also implied that we had been duped. We closed ranks with the policy as well as with the troops. We conflated the warriors and the war. So did the country, in ways that became toxic.

Today the equivalent of "We back you" slogans can be found on military posts across the country, expressed in yellow ribbons and lapel pins and yard signs supporting the troops in Iraq. In a relatively small, volunteer Army, the agony of 1,300 dead and 10,000 wounded sears some communities



A U.S. Marine walks beneath a tangle of electrical wiring during a foot patrol in Ramadi, Iraq, on Sunday. For some in the States, keeping the warriors and the war untangled is hard.

more than others, and none more than the extended family that is the professional military.

Many feel a profound disquiet: at the hard truth that the central provocations for invading Iraq proved spurious; at the stress fractures appearing within the Army and Marine Corps — great armies are hard to build and easy to break; at the dearth of meaningful allied support in a robust coalition of the capable rather than a thin amalgam of the willing; and at the risk of another rift opening between the military and our larger republic.

Soldiers and their families also know, viscerally, that war is corrupting, even a justifiable or inevitable war. Eventually combat does bad things to good soldiers. Not that it makes them capable of atrocity — the overwhelming majority today are too balanced, too professional, too well led for that, although the rash of soldiers and Marines court-martialed or under investigation for various depredations in Iraq is unnerving. But war is corrosive of decency and nobility; it tarnishes the spirit. Perhaps the best example is Wilfred Owen, the great English poet who commanded a platoon in World War I.

Shortly before his death near the end of that war, Owen described sorting through incoming mail to his soldiers who had just been killed. "My senses are charred," he wrote. "I don't take the cigarette out of my mouth when I write. Deceased over their letters."

Since before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, military communities in both the active and reserve forces have closed ranks. For them, their core affirmation is again personal, not political, although they instinctively and legally follow the military hierarchy and the commander in chief. The senior officers among them, by tradition and training, offer their best advice on tactics and strategy, then how to the decisions of their superiors.

But as this war grinds on, as these dead stack up, soldiers and their families are faced with the appalling suspicion that their troops are risking their lives in a cause that is uncertain at best and illegitimate at worst.

While some private doubts, others insist — often with increasing stridency — that the war is justified, that the insurgency can be crushed and that naysaying undermines both national will and troop morale. I admire their steadfast faith, even as I recognize the dilemma. To disbelieve seems too much like betrayal. Skepticism and dissent appear inimical to service and sacrifice.

Keeping the warriors and the war untangled is extraordinarily difficult, especially and emotionally. All that most of us can do is to mean precisely what we say. We back you.

Rick Atkinson, a former staff writer for The Washington Post (where this column first appeared), is the author of "An Army at Dawn" and "In the Company of Soldiers."

Peterson gateway to real news remained closed

There are times when it's utterly humiliating to be a working journalist. This is one of those times.

Media fixation (OK, partial media fixation, to be precise) with the Scott Peterson case was, or should have been, an embarrassment to all Americans, journalists and nonjournalists alike.

For the cable news networks and the tabloids, Peterson's trial presented a free key to a Treasury Department printing press — an unfettered opportunity to profit from titillation by scandal-mongering, shock-schlock journalism of the lowest caliber. Sadder yet, it was a missed opportunity to teach American news consumers something of value about an issue that may actually touch their lives.

There was something about the Peterson case that could have been reported, but rarely if ever was, that might have helped people. Laci Peterson was hardly alone as a pregnant woman murdered by a spouse or partner. She may have been somewhat unusual in that she was economically well-off (or so it seemed), poster-girl pretty and apparently in what was trumpeted to all the world as a blissful union with Scott.

But the gruesome truth is, she was emblematic of a terrible (and preventable) trend in American life. Studies have shown that a leading cause of death among pregnant women is homicide committed by a spouse or partner. And despite having lived through two years of Scott Peterson's inhabiting our living rooms, too few Americans learned this while watching his murder trial.

Last year, The Associated Press reported, "Homicide was found to be the leading cause of death for pregnant women in Maryland, according to a March 2001 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association... [N]ationwide, the maternal mortality rate was just 9.9 percent in 1999, the most recent year for which statistics are available."

The AP release continued to say, "The [JAMA] study reinforced at least two earlier studies that found homicide to be the top killer of pregnant women. In Cook County, Ill., 26 percent of the 95 deaths of pregnant women recorded between 1986 and 1989 (were murders). In New York, 25 percent of the 293 deaths among pregnant women between 1987 and 1991 were homicides."

Homicide a leading cause of death for pregnant women? Did the cable channels or tabloids make this clear during the trial? Or were they too busy informing us about Scott

and Amber Frey, or detailing every meaningless personal interaction among the jurors? I fear it's the latter.

A Web site called Grade the News, which monitors San Francisco media, sported one of the more interesting articles I've seen about the Peterson case. It quoted reporters who covered the story and later confessed to experiencing major embarrassment about their chosen life's work. One female reporter was quoted as saying, "I believed, when I started covering this, that it was totally sensationalistic and overcovered and flimsy in terms of affecting people's lives."

Then the Web site added, "More than a year ago, Grade the News surveyed journalists converging on Mr. Peterson's hometown of Modesto for the pretrial hearing. They rated the story moderately interesting, but by and large unimportant."

"One reporter, who asked not to be named, said bluntly: 'It is a shame that we,

as newspaper [reporters] and our friends in the broadcast world, circle around this story in the name of journalism. Few of us care about the story or its implications — lack thereof, I say.'"

So why do they cover it? Ratings, readership, organizations desperate to grab viewers/readers at any cost. There's little left that's noble about the Fourth Estate (or at least large sections of it). Cable news and tabloid periodicals, if they ever did, certainly do not now have as their raison d'être, to educate Americans to salient facts in the world around them. Or perhaps they are in "slow" news periods, in between "Trials of the Century" (of which there have been a half-dozen in the last decade.) What will they do now that Scott Peterson's story is nearing its end? Thank God, they must be saying, there's no shortage of trash news.

Bonnie Erbe is a TV host and writes this column for Scripps Howard News Service.

Bonnie Erbe



Mallard Fillmore



I WANTED THAT HARD-TO-FIND GIFT JUST FOR YOU...



I LOOKED ALL OVER THE PLACE. BUT IT TURNED OUT THE THING THAT WAS HARDEST TO FIND...



BY BRUCE TINSLEY

Horoscope

If life is a party, the Gemini moon is a consummate hostess, buzzing around to make sure we're all mixing and mingling. Don't expect anything of depth to be exchanged — but doesn't that take the pressure off? It's so much easier to make that phone call or show up at the meeting when you know it's going to be a breezy (if superficial) encounter.

Holiday Mathis



TODAY'S BIRTHDAY

(December 23). You do your share of howling at the moon this year. Getting in touch with your wildness creates more harmony and fun in your world. This spring, the stars heed your unshared unusual abilities such as painting, musical talents, writing and the ability to make money through the stock market. You have a fantastic love match in Cancer and Virgo.

ARIES (March 21-April 19).

The team chemistry is right on today. It's astounding how well you can get along when everyone is working toward a mutual goal. Even someone you thought you were basically incompatible with shows you a new side.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20).

Make the best of a changing situation. It will be a while before you know how things will settle in, so don't spend a bunch of money on what you might need. An organized Virgo can help you through the transition.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21).

Mentally, you're leaping into the future while physically you're doing much the same thing you did yesterday. Singles could put an end to serial monogamy by asking someone for a more permanent relationship.

CANCER (June 22-July 22).

Inheritance figures into today's equation. There are some things you earn in obvious ways and other things you earn in not-so-obvious ways. But you can bet that any gifts you receive now are well deserved.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22).

Your strong opinions and artistic style put you in the minority, but this only

makes you feel more special. Questions of etiquette arise. When in doubt, give a 20 percent tip. Your generosity wings right back at you.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22).

Success is born out of the trust you inspire in others. And why shouldn't they trust you? You're impartial and committed to the public good. You'll get the chance to make a closing statement and leave a lasting impression.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23).

Be on high alert for signals that it's your turn to step in and take over a nasty situation. As soon as the powers that be leave an opening, you can grab the reins and steer things back toward the promised land.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21).

High-stakes ventures are favored. There's no excuse for passing up an opportunity to show someone your work. Risking rejection is just part of success — ask any successful person. Take a chance.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21).

There's no more productive thing you can do than clean up a mess. Turn up the tunes, and tackle it. Until you make a commitment to get organized, useful opportunities will fall through the cracks.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19).

Re-examine and revise your list of things you'd like to accomplish in this lifetime. If you're one of the few Capricorns in the world who hasn't yet made your list, don't wait! It's probably the most important exercise you'll do.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18).

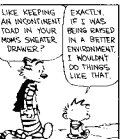
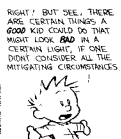
It's tempting to be part of the nuttiness. But to avoid wasting time navigating through chaos, choose a road you know for certain is not under construction. Go for the straightforward tasks you can accomplish in an hour.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20).

You don't need to play hard to get. The fact that you are hard to get is implied already in your busy, fabulous lifestyle. Whether it's a romantic partner, a job or another situation, be yourself, and let it come to you.

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Calvin and Hobbes



Jump Start



Zits



Cathy



Hi and Lois



Beetle Bailey



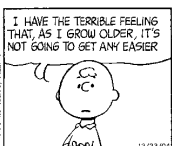
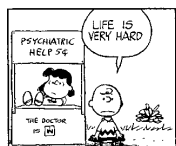
Red Rover



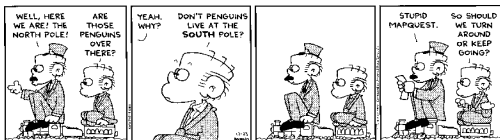
Better or Worse



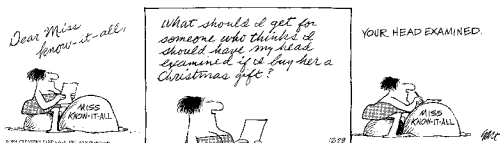
Peanuts



Fotrot



B.C.



Baby Blues



Spider Man



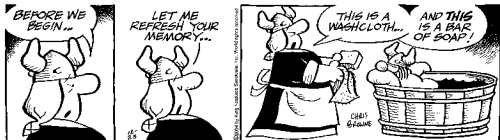
Blondie



Dilbert



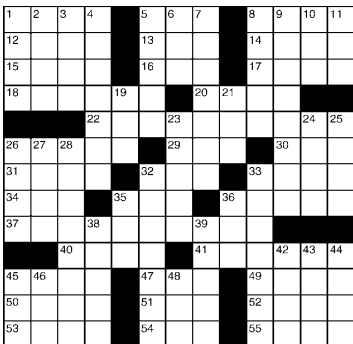
Hagar



Garfield



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



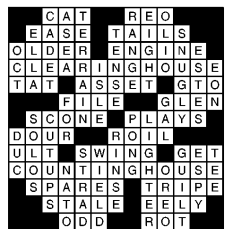
Across

- 1 Beyond control
- 5 Round Table address
- 8 Kohoutek feature
- 12 Creche trio
- 13 Farm implement
- 14 In a bad way
- 15 "do"
- 16 Piratic potable
- 17 Prepare a casserole
- 18 Put aside
- 20 Related
- 22 Hard candy
- 26 Street's boss
- 29 Dryly humorous
- 30 Lemieux milieu
- 31 Unctuous
- 32 Put into words
- 33 Rounded handle
- 34 Altar affirmative
- 35 Depot (Abbr.)
- 36 — cum laude
- 37 Felon
- 40 Indigent
- 41 Garland
- 45 Break ground
- 47 Lumox
- 49 Killer whale
- 50 Messenger's vehicle
- 51 Squid squirt
- 52 Actress Madeline
- 53 Prognosticator
- 54 "CSI" evidence
- 55 Black, in verse

Down

- 1 Writer Kingsley
- 2 Report-card heading
- 3 Look longingly
- 4 Party pooper
- 5 Petrichio's challenge
- 6 Debtor's letters
- 7 Knot again?
- 8 Leg bone
- 9 Comic born
- 10 Irwin Knibberg
- 11 Sort
- 12 Caustic solution
- 13 Forefront
- 14 Crucial
- 15 Master, in jungle movies
- 16 Abby's sis
- 24 Greenspan subj.
- 25 Ms. McEntire
- 26 Dudge
- 27 Verdi opera
- 28 Laggard
- 32 Performance-enhancing drug
- 33 Amateur songfest
- 35 Sellout sign
- 36 Chaps
- 37 Garden shelter
- 39 "The Trial" writer
- 42 Unexciting
- 43 Reverberate
- 44 Horace or Herbie
- 45 Big Bird's home?
- 46 Whopper
- 48 Abby's sis

Answer to Previous Puzzle



12-23

CRYPTOQUIP

RI NROT SUJUCRNHC QHN
RONA WURDHY RNHWC
CXAPDY TAP SUT WAJH
IAJ CXRSSROQ IDHUC?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I DON'T EVER CARRY AROUND COINS. I GUESS YOU MIGHT SAY I'M AVERSE TO CHANGE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals F

Abuse of any kind can't be allowed

Dear Abby: You printed a letter from "Beaten Down in Oklahoma," who said that although she had a history of severe depression, her verbally abusive husband refused to allow her to get medication "because he didn't believe in it." He told her she was "worthless" and said he only kept her around so he could be near his kids. That letter could have been written by me five years ago.

I was nine years into a physically and emotionally abusive marriage. I heard the same things from my husband.

And afterward, when he was trying to make up, he too always said he "didn't mean it."

Well, it turned out he did mean it. Once he found his next victim — a younger woman — he walked out. As he left, he announced it was because everything he'd said had been the truth.

You should have advised "Beaten Down" to see a lawyer in

addition to a counselor, while she still has a shred of self-esteem. Following my divorce, I got counseling. Once I felt better about myself, I met a wonderful man. We're married now.

— Full of Hope
in Georgia

Dear Full of Hope: I heard from many readers who identified with that letter and felt it was important for her to get away. Read on:

Dear Abby



Dear Abby: A husband who tells his wife she's worthless and stupid is using verbal abuse to wear her down and control her.

Marriage counseling and psychiatrists can't help. The man has low self-esteem and tries to make himself appear powerful and intelligent by making his wife feel inadequate.

Every day she stays with him is far more harmful to the children than taking them and leaving.

— Diane in Pennsylvania

Parents' problems are their own

Dear Annie: I am 26 years old and living in my parents' home while I attend medical school full time. My mother is miserable in her marriage to my father (he is significantly older than she is), and it is beginning to take its toll on me.

Every single day, Mom complains that Dad ignores her, doesn't care about her, and on and on. She remembers every wrong anyone has ever done to her as nurses grudge. I have been putting up with this misery for a few years now, and it's getting worse. I cannot stand living here, but I cannot afford to be on my own.

I love my mother and want to see her happy, but she carries around a lot of anger and resentment. My father is the "king of oblivion."

He walks around as if nothing is wrong. When I suggest to Mom that she see a counselor, she gets defensive and claims she'll just "live out her life this way." What

Annie's Mailbox



can I do to make my life, as well as my parents' lives, more positive?

— Desperate
in New Jersey

Dear Desperate: You cannot make your parents happy. They are the only ones who can do the work and make the changes that will improve their marriage. Also consider the possibility that your parents are comfortable with this level of misery. Some people derive great satisfaction in complaining.

Don't get sucked in to your parents' problems. As you can afford to move out, do so.

Dear Annie: I am newly married, and my in-laws have come to my home for dinner twice so far. My husband has a little sister, 5 years old.

"Cindy" is a picky eater, but my real problem is with my mother-in-law.

The first time they came to dinner, Mom fed Cindy a bolo-

gnia sandwich instead of having her eat what I served. Yesterday, they came again, and Cindy was carrying a McDonald's Happy Meal. Yet Mom frets that Cindy is unwilling to try new foods.

I worked very hard on my dinner and was upset that Cindy was permitted to eat junk while we enjoyed a good meal. Am I wrong to be offended?

— Frustrated in West Virginia

Dear Frustrated: It's natural that you want to impress your in-laws with your cooking, but Cindy is 5 years old, and it sounds as if she would not appreciate it. Few children that age like to experiment with new foods.

Have you considered the possibility that Mom believes Cindy would reject your cuisine and she wants to avoid hurting your feelings? While it would be nice if she indulged the girl with something healthier, there's no reason for you to be offended.

— Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, c/o Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

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THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

I guess I've put on a few pounds

DESPITE A TIGHT BUDGET, HE BOUGHT A NEW TUXEDO WHEN IT WAS HARD TO

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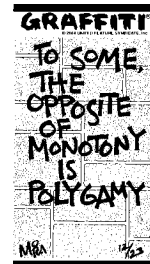
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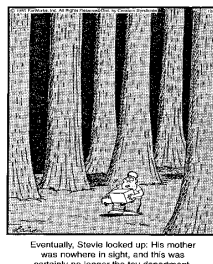
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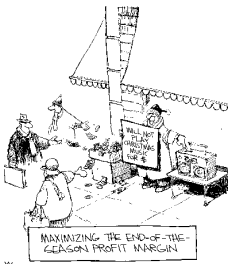
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AP

The Diamondbacks said they will resolve pitcher Randy Johnson's situation by then end of the month.

Yankees angry when L.A. 'renegs' on Johnson deal

Trade fell through as N.Y. pursued Beltran

BY RONALD BLUM

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Confident their deal to acquire Randy Johnson had been finalized, top Yankees' officials headed to Florida on Tuesday to see Carlos Beltran. By the time their meeting with the star outfielder was over, the trade for the Big Unit had fallen through.

The Los Angeles Dodgers reversed course Tuesday and withdrew from the proposed three-team, 10-player trade that would have sent Johnson from the Arizona Diamondbacks to the Yankees.

"As we sit here right now, the deal is no more," Dodgers General Manager Paul DePodesta said during a conference call. "I've been saying all along that we weren't going to do the deal unless it made sense for this club in 2005, and that was not the case."

Los Angeles would have received right-hander Javier Vazquez from the Yankees along with two top prospects, catcher Dioner Navaro and third baseman Eric Duncan. The Dodgers also would have gotten pitcher Mike Kopechne from Arizona.

Arizona would have obtained outfielder Shawn Green and pitchers Brad Penny, Yency Brazoban and Brandon Weeden from the Dodgers.

Along with Johnson, the Yankees would have gotten pitcher Kaz Ishii from Los Angeles.

"The Dodgers reneged on the deal that was agreed to last Friday, unequivocally and with no contingencies except for a window for contract extensions and physicals," Yankees president Randy Levine said. "For some

Baseball roundup

reason, the Dodgers over the weekend started to backpedal. Why they would break their word is only something they can answer. It sure is disappointing, and we'll have to think long and hard before ever doing business with the Dodgers again."

Diamondbacks managing general partner Ken Kendrick wouldn't comment on the Dodgers' decision. He intends to resolve Johnson's situation by the end of the month.

"We don't think it's a healthy thing for us or for his future to the uncertainty of his situation to continue into next year," Kendrick said.

Levine and general manager Brian Cashman went to Florida to join owner George Steinbrenner in the meeting with Beltran, likely to get the largest contract among this offseason's free agents. The session at Legends Field in Tampa, which also included agent Scott Boras, lasted about one hour, and no offers were made.

Earlier in the day, an official of one of the teams and a person close to one of the players involved in the trade said the deal had been submitted early Tuesday to baseball Commissioner Bud Selig for approval. The two spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The official said the Dodgers gave the go-ahead to finalize the trade late Monday and early Tuesday, when two conference calls were held. One call involved the general managers and baseball executive vice president Sandy Alderson, and the other included

ownership representatives and Selig.

"We went over various considerations and most of the details of the proposed transaction," Alderson said. "I expected to have a follow-up this morning, and that never occurred."

The Yankees even told Vazquez's agent that the deal had been submitted for approval, causing the agent to tell the pitcher he had been traded.

But Pat Courtney, a spokesman in the commissioner's office, said in the afternoon that more documentation had to be submitted before Selig could consider the complex transaction, and the Dodgers then held a conference call to announce their withdrawal.

"There were specific things in this deal that didn't work out," DePodesta said. "There were a lot of things to work out, a lot of things that were tentatively agreed on, but still details that we needed to work through."

In free agent news, third baseman Joe Randa agreed Tuesday to a \$2.15 million, one-year contract with Cincinnati, and Colorado agreed to one-year contracts that kept catcher Todd Greene (\$750,000) and right-hander Jamey Wright (\$550,000) with the Rockies.

In addition, the Yankees finalized their \$4 million, two-year contract with second baseman Tony Womack, a deal agreed to Dec. 7.

New York also reached a preliminary agreement with right-hander Tanyon Sturtz on a one-year deal worth about \$850,000 and called a news conference for Wednesday to finalize its \$39.95 million, four-year contract with right-hander Carl Pavano.

SCOREBOARD

AFN TV & Radio

Thursday

AFN-Sports, 4 p.m.—College football: GMAC Bowl, Memphis vs. Bowling Green.

AFN-Sports, 4 p.m.—Pro football: NFL Films Game of the Week (I) (2): Denver at Seattle (6).

AFN-Sports, 6 p.m.—Pro basketball: Denver at Seattle (6).

Friday

AFN-Radio, 12:30 a.m.—College football: Fort Worth, Cincinnati vs. Marshall.

AFN-Atlantic, 1 a.m.—College basketball: Richmond at Pittsburgh.

AFN-Sports, 2 a.m.—College basketball: Minnesota at Kansas.

AFN-Atlantic, 2 a.m.—College basketball: Providence at Villanova.

AFN-Radio, 3:45 a.m.—College football: Phoenix vs. Vision Bowl, UCLA vs. Wyoming.

AFN-Sports, 12:30 p.m.—College football: Phoenix vs. Vision Bowl, UCLA vs. Wyoming (I).

AFN-Sports and Radio, 9 p.m.—Pro football: Green Bay at Minnesota.

All Times Central European Time. It indicates delayed broadcasting. All listings are subject to change. Visit www.afn.net for more information.

Pro football

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE			
East	W	L	Pct
Y-New England	12	0	.923 .593
Y-Pittsburgh	10	2	.833 .543
Buffalo	8	4	.667 .530
Y-Indianapolis	8	4	.667 .530
Y-Jacksonville	8	4	.667 .530
Y-Tennessee	8	4	.667 .530
NFC			
East	W	L	Pct
Y-Pittsburgh	13	1	.923 .523
Y-Cincinnati	10	4	.706 .513
Y-Cincinnati	10	4	.706 .513
Y-San Diego	8	4	.667 .513
Y-Denver	8	4	.667 .513
Y-Oakland	8	4	.667 .513

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE			
East	W	L	Pct
Y-Philadelphia	13	1	.923 .593
Y-N.Y. Giants	10	4	.706 .513
Y-Washington	10	4	.706 .513
South			
Atlanta	8	4	.667 .513
Y-Carolina	8	4	.667 .513
Y-New Orleans	8	4	.667 .513
Y-Minnesota	8	4	.667 .513
Y-Detroit	8	4	.667 .513
West			
Seattle	8	4	.667 .513
Y-Arizona	8	4	.667 .513
Y-San Francisco	8	4	.667 .513

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Y-San Francisco	8	4	.667 .513

Wednesday, Dec. 22

CMAC Bowl
at Mobile, Ala.
Thursday: 7:00 a.m.

Fort Worth (12-0) vs. Cincinnati (8-3)
Thursday: 7:00 a.m.

Las Vegas Bowl
at Las Vegas, Nev.
Thursday: 7:00 a.m.

Worming (6-5) vs. UCLA (5-3)
Friday: 6:00 a.m.

Hawaii Bowl
at Honolulu, Hawaii
Monday: 7:00 a.m.

MPC Computers Bowl
at Boise, Idaho
Monday: 7:00 a.m.

Frederick State (9-3) vs. Virginia (8-3)
Monday: 7:00 a.m.

at Detroit
Monday: 7:00 a.m.

Independence Bowl
at St. Louis, Mo.
Monday: 7:00 a.m.

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Saturday, Jan. 29

Senior Bowl
at Mobile, Ala.
Monday: 7:00 a.m.

North vs. South
Monday: 7:00 a.m.

College basketball

AP Men's Top 25 fared

1. Illinois (10-0) did not play. Next vs. Missouri, Wednesday.

2. Kansas (10-0) did not play. Next vs. Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Wednesday.

3. Oklahoma State (9-1) vs. West North-Western Oklahoma 92-35. Next at N. 13 Gonzaga, Tuesday.

4. North Carolina (9-1) beat Vermont 93-65. Next vs. North Carolina, Wednesday.

5. Duke (9-1) did not play. Next vs. Clemson, Sunday, Jan. 31.

6. Syracuse (9-1) did not play. Next vs. Rice, Wednesday.

7. Kentucky (9-1) did not play. Next vs. William & Mary, Wednesday.

8. Connecticut (9-1) did not play. Next vs. Charleston Southern, Wednesday.

9. Pittsburgh (9-0) did not play. Next vs. Richmond, Thursday.

10. Connecticut (9-1) did not play. Next vs. Central Connecticut State, Wednesday.

11. Gonzaga (9-1) did not play. Next vs. Sacred Heart, Wednesday.

12. Washington (9-1) did not play. Next vs. Eastern Washington 80-70. Next at N. 10 Oklahoma State, Tuesday.

14. Arizona (8-0) beat Manhattan 105-75. Next vs. Arizona, Wednesday.

15. Texas (7-2) did not play. Next vs. Connecticut, Wednesday.

16. North Carolina State (9-1) beat Brigham Young 72-61. Next vs. Colorado State, Wednesday.

17. Michigan (8-0) did not play. Next vs. Texas, Tuesday.

18. Indiana (10-1) beat Texas Tech 83-53. Next vs. Air Force, Tuesday.

19. Louisville (9-1) beat Indiana-Purdue-Indianapolis 89

Stoudamire has impressive return for No. 14 Arizona

The Associated Press

Salim Stoudamire was suspended for Arizona's last game and the Wildcats had their lowest point total in 19 years.

The senior guard was back Tuesday night, and No. 14 Arizona responded with its highest-scoring game of the season, a 105-75 rout of Manhattan.

Stoudamire played 20 minutes and had 23 points on 7-of-8 shooting from three-point range. He made his first seven three-point shots, then threw up an air ball in an attempt to tie the Jason Gardner's school record.

"He got hit on the elbow or that one might have gone in, too," said Arizona coach Luke Olson, who suspended Stoudamire for last weekend's 48-43 victory at Marquette because the guard pointed in the previous game.

Olson told Stoudamire to be himself and quit worrying so much.

"I wanted to have fun regardless of if I played good or not," said Stoudamire, who had seven threes for the fourth time in his career. "I wanted to go out and smile and have fun."

Asked if the suspension fixed what has been an ongoing problem with his moody guard, Olson said, "I hope so because I'm out of ideas."

"Salim is a very nice young man and he needs to show it," Olson said.

Channing Frye added 18 points and 11 rebounds for the Wildcats (8-2), who won their fifth straight.

"Everybody said we were in a scoring drought," Frye said. "I guess this raises our average a little bit."

Freshman C.J. Anderson scored 22 points on 7-of-9 shooting for Manhattan (4-3), which committed 24 turnovers.

The Wildcats passed the total they had against Marquette in less than 20 minutes against the Jaspers, taking a 57-29 halftime

College basketball roundup

Manhattan coach Bobby Gonzalez said, "They really put it together tonight."

It was the worst loss in Gonzalez's six seasons with the Jaspers and the first time since 1990 that Manhattan allowed an opponent to score 100 points.

Stoudamire didn't start, but entered with 14:49 to play in the first half and scored 11 points in the next seven minutes. Arizona led by as many as 43 points in the second half and finished 13-for-21 on threes.

"A lot of people are worried about our shooting," Olson said.

"I'm not one of them."

Men's Top 25

No. 3 Oklahoma State 92, NW Oklahoma 35: At Stillwater, Okla., John Lucas and Joey Graham each scored 21 points and the Cowboys (9-0) set a school record with 15 three-pointers. Jameson Curry had eight straight points in a 12-0 run that put Oklahoma State ahead 87-27. The Cowboys were 15-for-23 on threes, including 10-for-15 in the second half.

Tramain Davis scored 12 points for the visiting Rangers (5-4), an NAIA school.

No. 4 North Carolina 93, Vermont 65: At Chapel Hill, N.C., Rashad McCants was held out of the starting lineup because he was late after getting stuck in traffic, but he bounced back from the brief benching to score 19 points for the Tar Heels (9-1).

Sean May had 20 points for North Carolina, which has won nine straight since an opening loss at Santa Clara. Taylor Coppenrath had 13 points, half his average, for the

lead.

"We came out a little surprised by their quickness and athleticism," he said.

"They really put it together tonight."

It was the worst loss in Gonzalez's six seasons with the Jaspers and the first time since 1990 that Manhattan allowed an opponent to score 100 points.

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"A lot of people are worried about our shooting," Olson said.

"I'm not one of them."



Arizona's Salim Stoudamire, who was benched for one game by coach Luke Olson, made seven of eight three-point attempts and scored 23 points Tuesday night in the Wildcats' 105-75 victory over Manhattan.

Catamounts (3-3).

No. 13 Gonzaga 83, E. Washington 70: At Spokane, Wash., Adam Morrison scored 25 points for the Bulldogs (9-1), who won their sixth straight overall and 19th in a row over their in-state rival.

Marc Axton had 33 points, including a school record-tying seven three-pointers, for the Eagles (2-8) in the game played in Spokane Arena.

No. 16 North Carolina State 72, BYU 61: At Provo, Utah, Julius Hodge scored 22 points, including four free throws over the final two minutes, and the Wolfpack (9-1) bounced back from Sunday's 68-64 loss at No. 12 Washington.

Mike Hall scored 15 points for the Cougars (2-8), who hosted an Atlantic Coast Conference team for the first time.

No. 17 Iowa 83, Texas Tech

53: At Chicago, Adam Haluska matched his career-high with 21 points and the Hawkeyes (10-1) had 10 blocked shots as Steve Alford beat Bob Knight, his college coach, for the first time in four meetings.

The game at Chicago's United Center was the worst loss for the Red Raiders (5-3) since March 9, 2002, when they lost 90-50 to then-No. 1 Kansas in the Big 12 tournament. The 53 points were their fewest since Jan. 11, 2003, when they lost 68-44 at Kansas State.

Jarrius Jackson led Texas Tech with 10 points and seven assists.

No. 18 Louisville 80, IUUPI 60: At Louisville, Ky., freshman Juan Palacios had 25 points and 10 rebounds to lead the Cardinals (7-2), who won in the first round of the Billy Minardi Classic despite not having Ellis Myles and Chris George, their two leading rebounders, because of injuries. Louisville will play Austin Peay in the title game of the tournament on hosts.

Akeem Clark hit seven three-pointers and scored 23 points for the Jaguars (4-5).

No. 23 Michigan State 76, UCLA 64: At East Lansing, Mich., Paul Davis scored 18 points and the Spartans (7-2) won their fourth straight game.

Josh Shipp, one of four freshmen to start for the Bruins (6-2), scored a career-high 18 points.

Service academies

Navy 90, Mount St. Mary's 81: At Emmitsburg, Md., Matt Ryan scored a game-high 19 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to lead Navy.

Corey Johnson contributed 15 points and Greg Sprink added 14 points for Navy (4-6). Sprink and Laramie Mergeron also grabbed 10 rebounds.

Leah Thompson scored a team-high 16 points for Mount St. Mary's (3-5).

Average MLB salary drops for only third time

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseball salaries went down in 2004 for the first time in a decade and only the third time since record-keeping began nearly 40 years ago.

The average dropped 2.5 percent this year to \$2,313,535, according to final figures released Tuesday by the Major League Baseball Players Association. The average had been \$2,372,189 in 2003.

Since the union started keeping track in 1967, the only previous decreases had been an \$86 drop in 1987, when owners were found to have conspired to hold down salaries among free agents, and a 4 percent decline in 1995, following a 7½-month strike that wiped out the World Series for the first time since 1994.

The players' association has spent the past two years trying to determine whether to file a new collusion grievance but has not taken action. Union head Donald Fehr said he hadn't determined what to attribute the drop to.

Sports briefs

"Obviously, we've been looking at things closely the last couple of years and we'll have to see how things play out," he said. "It's too early to tell."

There was no spending drop for the New York Yankees, who established a record with a \$6.38 million average, more than \$1.4 million above the previous mark they set two years ago.

Rocca wins men's slalom after Miller crashes

FLACHAU, Austria — Italy's Giorgio Rocca won the men's World Cup slalom on Wednesday after American Bode Miller crashed and failed to qualify for the second run.

Rocca finished with a combined time of 1 minute, 34.86 seconds, beating Austria's Rainer Schenfelder by 0.24 seconds. German Alois Vogel was third, 0.31 seconds behind the first podium finish of his career.

Miller still leads the overall standings with 858 points after 15 events. Austria's Benjamin Raich, who finished sixth Wednesday, is second with 546 points, followed by Hermann Maier with 482.

Maze makes women's GS for second career World Cup win

ST. MORITZ, Switzerland — Sweden's Tina Maze won her second career World Cup race Wednesday, and defending champion Anja Paerson regained the lead in the overall standings with a second-place finish in the giant slalom.

Maze was behind Paerson after the first run, but had a smooth, clean second run down the sun-soaked Zugspitze. She finished with a combined time of 2 minutes, 26.99 seconds. Paerson finished second with an aggregate time of 2:27.11, with Marie Jose Rienda Contreras of Spain third in 2:27.73.

Julia Mancuso had the best U.S. result, finishing sixth in 2:28.52.

The deadline to enter your picks for the NFL Challenge is fast approaching!

Log in every week during the 2004 NFL Season and make your picks for the winners of the upcoming NFL games. Earn points for every winning team you pick and at the end of the season, you may find yourself the winner. Enter the "secret code" from Monday's paper and OCONUS's year-point total for the week!

*Certain rules and restrictions apply. See the official rules at www.oconus.com and on stripes.com. There is no cost to participants, but you must register to play.

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Don't drop the ball!
Login to www.stripes.com
or www.oconus.com

Week 16 Pick Deadline:
2:00 pm, U.S. Central Time
Friday, December 24

As a **BONUS PRIZE**, the top winner each week will receive \$100 toward merchandise at TeamStore.com

TEAMSTORE.COM

STARS & STRIPES.
OCONUS

Jaguars' Darius fined \$75,000 for clothesline hit

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jacksonville safety Donovan Darius was fined \$75,000 by the NFL on Tuesday for a hit across the neck of Green Bay's Robert Ferguson that left the wide receiver temporarily paralyzed.

Darius, who was ejected from the game, wasn't suspended because league disciplinary Gene Washington said this was the first time he had been fined for a violation.

The hit came during the fourth quarter of Jacksonville's 28-25 victory at Green Bay. Ferguson caught a pass over the middle, and Darius hit him across the helmet and neck with a forearm. Ferguson regained feeling in his legs after he was hospitalized. He remained in the hospital Sunday and Monday nights.

He was released on Tuesday. Darius said in a statement that he spoke with Ferguson on Monday.

"We had a good conversation in which he told me he has no hard feelings," Darius said. "We agreed that it was a part of the game. The most important thing

is that Robert is OK."

Darius, whose annual salary is more than \$4 million a season, was ejected from the game by referee Ed Hochuli.

"You violently and unnecessarily struck your opponent in the neck and head area with your forearm," Washington said in his letter to Darius.

"I don't know him personally. He seems like a good guy and it's an unfortunate hit," Packers quarterback Brett Favre said. "And his comments were he was going for the ball. Maybe he was. Maybe his sole intention was to knock the ball out, but it just didn't seem like it."

"You'd hate to think that you'd ruin a guy's career, and Ferguson, by all accounts, will come back for it. But mentally will he be the same? I don't know."

Dolphins want to talk with LSU's Saban again

DAVIE, Fla. — Miami Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga wants to talk with LSU coach Nick Saban again before offering anyone the team's coaching job.

Saban interviewed with Huizenga last week and is the front-runner to become the sixth coach in Dolphins history. Former Oak-

NFL injury update

Injuries to prominent NFL players, followed by team's prognosis. (See Friday's edition for complete injury report provided by the league):
Willie McGahey (hyperextended and bruised knee) status uncertain.

land Raiders coach Art Shell interviewed Monday, and Dolphins interim coach Jim Bates interviewed Tuesday.

Emerging from his meeting with Bates, Huizenga declined to say whether there are other candidates. But he said the Dolphins weren't ready to make an offer.

"We still have a lot of work to do," Huizenga said. "We just have to figure out how soon we can get it done. Hopefully it won't be too much longer."

Raiders' Woodson, Anderson quiet a day after their arrests

ALAMEDA, Calif. — Charles Woodson and Marques Anderson returned to work Tuesday and met with coach Norv Turner a day after their arrest for public intoxication.

"It's always a concern," Turner said of suspect off-field behavior. "It's an unfortunate situation, and we're going to deal with it."

He didn't elaborate on disciplin-

ary action the team might take.

Anderson practiced, but Woodson was held out with a knee injury and is doubtful for Saturday's game at Kansas City.

The rest of the Oakland Raiders didn't want to talk about their teammates' trouble.

"I block that out," defensive end Bobby Hamilton said. "It's up to the individual."

Neither Woodson nor Anderson had addressed their teammates about what happened, and they weren't in the locker room during media availability.

League spokesman Steve Alic said Tuesday the players could qualify for the NFL's substance-abuse program, but only suspensions — and not fines — are made public. Woodson might already be part of the program because he has a previous offense.

A spokeswoman with the Alameda County District Attorney's office said her office expected to receive police reports from the arrests by late Tuesday or early Wednesday, and the players could face charges.

Woodson and Anderson were arrested at 4:20 a.m. PST Monday in Oakland after refusing to leave the back seat of a woman's car, and both were jailed briefly. The

woman's name and age weren't released, though she is from Oakland. It was unclear whether the players knew her.

Police said Woodson and Anderson were uncooperative, had problems maintaining their balance, had bloodshot watery eyes and a strong odor of alcohol. They were acting in a belligerent manner, police said.

Cowboys sticking with Testaverde as starting QB

IRVING, Texas — Bill Parcells thinks Vynny Testaverde gives the Dallas Cowboys the best chance to win, so he's keeping the 41-year-old as his starting quarterback.

There was speculation Parcells was going to turn to one of his youngsters, either highly touted rookie Drew Henson or Tony Romo, who was promoted to second string last week.

But with Dallas (5-9) still having a slim chance of making the playoffs, Parcells is sticking with Testaverde for Sunday's game against the Washington Redskins. While Testaverde will start, Parcells said Romo will get extra work in practice and may see some playing time.

"I'm of the mind-set that I might use Romo," Parcells said.

Steelers go for the clincher vs. Ravens

By ALAN ROBINSON

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers have a chance to play a meaningless game this season after all.

For six consecutive weeks after Pittsburgh beat New England 34-20 on Oct. 31, the Steelers (13-1) and Patriots (12-2) matched each other for win or loss as each sought home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs. The Steelers owned the tiebreaker, but understood that one badly played game could change that.

"We knew there was going to be a team to beat somebody," wide receiver Hines Ward said Tuesday. "Hopefully, it wasn't us having a letdown game."

Now, after the Dolphins rallied from 11 points down with three minutes remaining

to beat the Patriots 29-28 on Monday night, the Steelers can claim a first-round bye and the home-field edge by beating Baltimore (8-6) on Sunday.

By extending their club-record winning streak to 13 games, the Steelers would ensure that their Jan. 2 game at Buffalo (8-6) would decide nothing more than whether they finish with the best record in franchise history.

"They're playing great football right now, so you don't want to have to win that (Buffalo) game," running back Jerome Bettis said. "We need to take care of business at home. This game is going to mean everything. This is the biggest game of the year."

Beating the Ravens would allow coach Bill Cowher to rest at least some of his half-dozen injured regulars for two weeks,

since the Steelers would sit out the wild-card round Jan. 8-9. Of that group, wide receiver Plaxico Burress, cornerback Chad Scott, linebacker Clark Haglund and running back Deuce Staley aren't expected to be fully healthy until the playoffs, and linebacker Kendrick Bell might not return at all.

"If we get this game, we clinch home and we get the bye and, going to Buffalo, I'm pretty sure a lot of people won't play," Ward said. "For whatever reason if we don't win this game, and we have to win in Buffalo, then you have two weeks where we're trying to put this one win together. But this week, what better way than having Baltimore come in?"

The Ravens held the Steelers their only loss 30-13 in Baltimore on Sept. 19, when quarterback Tommy Maddox injured his right elbow and was lost for six weeks.



Steelers receiver Antwan Randle El would like to celebrate home-field advantage in the AFC playoffs with one more victory.

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Top Scores for Week 15

250	berkster	CEC	2616	giants#1	hbc 2/37 ar
238	dolphinfan	Deidra Sollars Elem.	2600	STEELEFROGWOOD	MSP-12
232	mukat	Yokosuka	2598	Jaguar One	DoDDS
230	PilgrimPride	Yokosuka	2596	Jack58	422 ABS RAF Croughton
230	diesel44express	35 CES Misawa	2596	Who Cares	MNF-1DCSPUR
226	Chipboudy	Camp Anaconda	2586	Bone-Daddy	HQ, USAREUR, G2
220	BIGLEW30	MRBN	2576	Joe Corleone	Misawa
220	YO' HERO	Camp Huggins	2572	BengalsAltheWay	ECJ2-JAC-DSTE
220	Azley	Camp Zama	2558	NEOBIT	USF1
220	what time is it?	naf atsuji	2556	chargers	napra

Best Overall Scores

2616	giants#1	hbc 2/37 ar
2600	STEELEFROGWOOD	MSP-12
2598	Jaguar One	DoDDS
2596	Jack58	422 ABS RAF Croughton
2596	Who Cares	MNF-1DCSPUR
2586	Bone-Daddy	HQ, USAREUR, G2
2576	Joe Corleone	Misawa
2572	BengalsAltheWay	ECJ2-JAC-DSTE
2558	NEOBIT	USF1
2556	chargers	napra

See website for official game rules.

Check this space every Thursday during the entire NFL season for the weeks Top Scores and Best Overall Scores during the NFL Challenge.

Memphis, Bowling Green enjoying revivals

Tigers in back-to-back bowls for first time; Falcons looking to continue MAC success

BY JOHN ZENOR

The Associated Press

MOBILE, Ala. — When DeAngelo Williams arrived at Memphis, the Tigers had just completed their seventh consecutive losing season and were about to endure No. 8.

"Our class wanted to change that," the prolific junior tailback said. "That's why some of us came here. We wanted to make an everlasting statement for this program, and we definitely did that."

The GMAC Bowl between Memphis and Bowling Green on Wednesday night is a chance for two once down-and-out programs to offer further evidence of impressive turnarounds and to showcase two of the nation's top offenses.

Memphis, which ended a 32-year bowl exile last season, is in the postseason two years in a row for the first time.

Bowling Green, meanwhile, is bowling for green — a \$750,000 payout — back-to-back years for only the second time and first since the 1991-92 seasons. The Falcons are also trying to continue the Mid-American Conference's recent winning postseason ways. MAC teams have won eight of their last nine bowl games.

"We're starting to show you the kind of players that are in the MAC," defensive back Keon Newton said. "We've got guys that can play and we've got guys that can play with the best in the nation."

"We're going to go in to this game not only to make a name for Bowling Green but to make a name for the MAC."

Williams and Bowling Green sophomore quarterback Omar Ja-



Bowling Green sophomore QB Omar Jacobs, the Mid-American Conference offensive player of the year, is the fourth-rated passer in the nation (167.8).

cobs are certainly deserving of more attention.

Williams, Conference USA's co-offensive player of the year, has rushed for 1,828 yards and 21 touchdowns, ranking second nationally in rushing and third in all-purpose yards.

Jacobs is the MAC's co-offensive player of the year and fourth-rated passer in the nation. He's hoping the GMAC Bowl can be the same kind of showcase for



Memphis's DeAngelo Williams, Conference USA's co-offensive player of the year, has rushed for 1,828 yards and 21 touchdowns this season.

him that it was for former MAC stars quarterbacks Ben Roethlisberger and Byron Leftwich.

"Those quarterbacks, Byron and Ben, have gone on to do well in the NFL and are big-time quarterbacks, and hopefully I'll also have a great game and be added to that list," Jacobs said.

Williams is complemented by quarterback Danny Wimprine, who has posted the school's top three passing seasons and directs the nation's 10th-rated offense.

"They're probably one of the better 1-2 punches in the nation right now," Newton said. "They're pretty explosive offensively."

"We've seen the running attack in Northern Illinois and the passing attack in Marshall. We haven't seen both really in the same game."

Williams is hoping to build much happier bowl memories after watching last year's New Or-

leans Bowl from the sidelines with a torn knee ligament.

"Now, to actually play in one and actually have the opportunity to win back-to-back bowl games — that's unheard of [at Memphis]," said Williams, who has 687 yards and eight touchdowns in the past three games. "That definitely gives us that much more determination to go win."

Jacobs ranks second nationally in total offense and passing yards and his 36 touchdown passes — against just three interceptions — is tops.

"Their passing game is just as good as any we've faced this year," Memphis defensive end Marcus West said. "Their running game can be a threat because of the pass."

The Tigers, who won the New Orleans Bowl last season, have three straight victories since back-to-back losses to Cincinnati and Louisville. Now, they're feeling like old hands in the bowl business.

"Last year I didn't really feel any pressure to win the bowl game," said coach Tommy West, who received a big raise and one-year contract extension this week. "It was almost a sign of relief to everyone that we were going. After 32 years, it was just good to go."

"I think there will be excitement (this time), but I don't think there will be the euphoria that there was a year ago."

The Falcons missed the MAC championship game after blowing a 20-point halftime lead against Toledo, ending a seven-game win streak.

"We just want to finish on a good note," Jacobs said. "We've got a sour taste in our mouth from the Toledo game."

Chance at NFL money means tough decision for Miami's Gore

BY TIM REYNOLDS

The Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Frank Gore knows that putting up big numbers in 2005 would greatly enhance his value to NFL teams, result in a higher draft pick and perhaps add many millions to his bank account.

He also knows that one misstep can take the chance at those riches away.

Miami tailback has already bucked the odds once, by overcoming major ligament damage to both of his knees; shattering the right one cost him all of the 2002 season, then blowing out the left one against West Virginia forced him out of the last eight games in 2003.

Now comes the toughest decision Gore has ever weighed: Does he return to Miami next season stronger, healthier and in a great position to impress NFL scouts, or does he roll the dice by taking whatever money comes his way



Miami running back Frank Gore missed all of 2002 and most of 2003 with major knee injuries, so returning for another season is risky. On the other hand, he could use another college season at full strength to improve his statistics and position in the NFL Draft.

now and forgo his final season of college eligibility?

"People always tell me that you can't think about it like that," said Gore, who has 865 yards this season. "If I was thinking about get-

ting hurt, I probably would have never played football again after the first injury. You can't have that on your mind."

Gore says he will wait until after Miami's Peach Bowl matchup on New Year's Eve against Florida to make up his mind. Miami coach Larry Coker is lobbying for a return.

"From what I know from professional people, Frank probably is not a high draft choice right now," Coker said. "Another year with Frank being healthier would be a tremendous benefit to him."

Doctors have told Gore that he likely needed two full years to completely recover from the second injury, and he's been slowed by knee pain on a few occasions this season. He ran for 8 yards in a September victory at Houston, plus managed a combined 73 in the Hurricanes' losses to North Carolina and Virginia Tech.

He also had flashes of brilliance. He rushed for 195 yards in Miami's victory at Virginia, and 124 in a victory at Georgia Tech.

"He's right up there with Willis McGahee, Clinton Portis, all the great backs we've had here," offensive lineman Chris Myers said. "I hope he comes back. He'll have an amazing offensive line here next season. But he'll be in the NFL one day either way and he's got to do what's best for him."

There are other extenuating circumstances surrounding Gore's decision.

Gore's mother has suffered from kidney disease for much of the last decade, and the family has limited financial resources. Plus, he's the father of a 2-year-old son and wants to ensure that he can provide for his child's future.

He's on track to graduate in May — something that people close to Gore consider his greatest achievement, especially considering he read at a third-grade level when he entered high school.

"I'm going to come home after the bowl game and figure it out,"

Gore said. "I haven't been checking up on it. I know that if I decide to come out, I'll have to work hard to impress the scouts in the combine."

His freshman season certainly was impressive: Gore averaged 9.1 yards a carry, helping Miami win the national championship.

Gore would have been the starter in 2002, the year McGahee gained a school-record 1,753 yards and led the Hurricanes back to the national title game. Instead, Gore spent the year rehabbing, fighting off depression and wondering if his NFL dreams would come true — then endured all that again last year.

While acknowledging that there are up to 250 of plenty of great running backs in this year's draft crop, Gore doesn't want having the dream dashed for good — perhaps indicating that'll do.

"I don't know what I will do," Gore said. "I'll do what I feel is best for me, my family, and my mom."

Down a ball for Georgia Tech, QB

BY MARK LONG
The Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Reggie Ball walked off the field after the Champs Sports Bowl with the most valuable player trophy under his left arm.

He might want to bring it with him to spring practice.

Georgia Tech coach Chan Gailey, who has been critical of his sophomore quarterback all season, reiterated this week that Ball will have to win back the starting job next year.

Ball certainly started his case Tuesday night. He threw two touchdown passes, ran for a score and led the Yellow Jackets to a 51-14 victory over Syracuse.

"I just let loose," Ball said. "I wasn't worried about proving anything. I know what I can do. I know what kind of leader I am."

Ball finished 12-of-19 for 207 yards with an interception, had 38 yards rushing and was named the game's MVP.

"He went out and performed extremely well, especially early in the game," Gailey said. "He's had a lot of criticism this year and suffered through a lot of adversity. I'm happy for him."

Much of the criticism came from Gailey, who expected more from Ball.

Ball opened the season with two strong games, then threw twice as many interceptions (16) as touchdowns in the final nine games.

Gailey even said Ball would have to earn back the starting job during spring practice. But Ball may have done that against the Orange.

He got plenty of help, though.

P.J. Daniels ran 17 times for 119 yards and two scores, Calvin Johnson set a school record for touchdowns by a freshman with his seventh, and the defense set the tone by returning an interception for a touchdown on the second play of the game. The unit added a safety with 1:42 to play.

Even special teams played a role, blocking a punt in the first quarter that the Yellow Jackets (7-5) converted into a touchdown.

The loss was the worst in a bowl game for Georgia (6-6) since the 1953 Orange Bowl, a 61-6 drubbing by Alabama. It also means more questions about the future of embattled coach Paul Pasqualoni.

Syracuse chancellor Nancy Cantor gave Pasqualoni a vote of confidence earlier this month, saying he would be retained for a 15th season. But the school also named longtime Southern California administrator Daryl Gross the new athletic director last week.

Gross replaces Jake Crouthamel, one of Pasqualoni's biggest supporters.

Gross dispelled rumors that he was already thinking about a replacement. However, he also said he would evaluate the athletic department after he completes his move in late January.

Georgia Tech's dominance Tuesday certainly won't help Pasqualoni.

Chris Reid intercepted Perry Patterson's down pass and returned it 20 yards for a touchdown.



Georgia Tech's Calvin Johnson makes a diving catch for a touchdown in front of Syracuse's O'Neil Scott (21) and Dan Weiss (22) in the Champs Sports Bowl in Orlando, Fla.



Georgia Tech quarterback Reggie Ball celebrates with the MVP trophy after Georgia Tech defeated Syracuse in the Champs Sports Bowl on Tuesday, 51-14. Ball threw two TDs.

"From the first pass of the game, things seemed to go against us," Pasqualoni said. "It was just one of those days where nothing we did went well."

After Syracuse made it 7-6, Georgia Tech scored touchdowns on three consecutive possessions to pretty much put the game away before halftime.

"We punched them in the mouth, but they punched right back," Syracuse safety Diamond Ferri said. "They deserved to win."

Ball found Johnson for a 10-yard score to make it 14-6. After getting the ball back, Ball rolled right and found Nate Curry down the

sideline for an 80-yard touchdown — the longest play of the season for the Yellow Jackets and the longest pass of Ball's career.

Syracuse went three-and-out on the ensuing possession, and Xavier McGuire blocked the punt to give his team the ball at the 14. Ball completed a third-down pass to the 2, and Daniels took it in from there.

Tech made it 35-6 just before halftime thanks mostly to Johnson.

He burned cornerback Tarnard Jackson and made a spectacular 51-yard catch over Ferri. He scored six plays later on an end around from the 5-yard line.

Georgia Tech 51, Syracuse 14

Syracuse	6	0	0	8-14
Georgia Tech	21	14	14	51
GT — Relb 20 interception return (Bell kick), 6:24.				
Syr — Patterson 21 run (kick failed), 6:24.				
GT — Johnson 21 pass from Ball (Bell kick), 2:36.				
GT — Curry 80 pass from Ball (Bell kick), 1:11.				

First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter
GT — Daniels 2 run (Bell kick), 12:27.	GT — Ball 11 run (Bell kick), 1:48.	Syr — Gregory 25 pass from Patterson (Darlington pass from Patterson), 11:22.	GT — Safety, Fields tackled in end zone, 1:42.

First downs	Syr	GT
Rushes-yards	31-51	53-296
Passing-yards	120	226
Comp-Att-int	22-39-2	13-20-1
Return Yards	7-40	2-35.0
Punts-Avg	7-45	5-38
Penalties-Yards	7-45	5-38
Time of Possession	24:10	35:50

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
Rushing — Syracuse, Gregory 2:16, Rhodes 9-14, Patterson 11-19, Sellers 3-8, Meyers 5-7, Fields 3-2, Georgia Tech, Daniels 1-15, Cox 1-5, Ivory 1-14, Johnson 1-21.
Passing — Syracuse, Gregory 2:16, Rhodes 9-14, Patterson 11-19, Sellers 3-8, Meyers 5-7, Fields 3-2, Georgia Tech, Daniels 1-15, Cox 1-5, Ivory 1-14, Johnson 1-21.
Georgia Tech: Ball 12-19, 207, Logan 12-21.
Receiving — Syracuse, Jones 6-21, S. Brown 5-66, Rhodes 1-1, Kowalski 1-5, Georgia Tech, Daniels 4-19, Curry 2-108, Johnson 2-61, Dunlap 1-21, Thomas 1-9, Williams 1-9, Woods 1-4.

Marshall, Cincinnati have much in common

BY STEPHEN HAWKINS
The Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — There are plenty of similarities between Cincinnati and Marshall besides their 6-5 records.

The Fort Worth Bowl will be the last game for each before moving to different conferences. Cincinnati is going to the Big East from Conference USA, the league Marshall will join next year after winning five of the past seven Mid-American titles.

If not for winning streaks after poor starts, neither senior-oriented team would be playing Thursday night.

"We've sort of been roller-coaster type teams, played some really good games, played some games we'd both like to have back," Marshall coach Bob Pruett said. "Our quarterbacks are very similar ... if they have a good day, we usually have a good day. If they have an off day, we sort of have a tough day."

Cincinnati knows that too well. The Bearcats lost their regular season finale 70-7 to No. 7 Louisville when quarterback Gene Guidigli was out with a broken bone in his throwing hand.

Before that, they had won four straight with Guidigli completing 71 percent of his passes for 1,022 yards with 12 touchdowns and no interceptions. He had a career-best 377 yards passing one game, a school-record five TDs in another.

Without Guidigli, the Bearcats got 33 yards passing from two quarterbacks and trailed Louisville 63-0 before scoring.

"Nobody wants to end the season on a game like that," said Guidigli, whose 24 TD passes are one of the school records.

"It's critical for us because obviously that game was not who we are," first-year coach Mark Dantonio said. "If we're not successful, it's a lost cause. We need to vindicate ourselves and play with the same attitude prior to that."

That loss to the C-USA champion on Oct. 9 may have even been the most humbling of the Bearcats were 2-4 on Oct. 9 after a 48-29 loss at Army, which ended a 19-game losing streak that was the nation's longest.

Instead of going in a rebuilding mode then, Dantonio stuck with his group of 19 senior starters. They responded with four wins and now return Guidigli, who was back at practice last week after his cast was removed.

The Thundering Herd, whose last losing record was in 1983, began this season with three straight losses, including at No. 8 Georgia and No. 24 Ohio State. They then won their first five MAC games, but losses to Akron and Bowling Green denied a departing championship.

"We get going in more game, a chance to prove we're a good team," said Josh Davis, only the second receiver in NCAA history with 300 receptions, "was one of the toughest schedules Marshall ever had. We overcame a lot of things."

BCS: New formula made each vote more important

BCS, FROM BACK PAGE

"Furthermore, to the extent that the public does not fully understand the relationship between BCS and AP, any animosity toward BCS may get transferred to AP. And to the extent that the public has equated or comes to equate the AP poll with the BCS rankings, the independent reputation of the AP poll is lost."

The latest BCS formula was installed after Southern California, the No. 1 team in both the media

and coaches poll, was left out of the BCS title game last season. LSU beat Oklahoma for the BCS title, and USC won the AP title, creating the type of split championship situation that, in part, the BCS was created to avoid.

But the new system has also come under fire.

For the first time in the BCS era, three teams from major conferences — Southern California, Oklahoma and Auburn — finished unbeaten in the regular season. Auburn was left out of the Orange Bowl with the same 12-0

record that USC and Oklahoma had.

Texas passed California for the last at-large bid in the final BCS standings, and had many lamenting the BCS.

The ESPN/USA Today poll caught the brunt of the criticism in the Texas-California Pac-10 Commissioner Tom Hansen and Cal coach Jeff Tedford both called for the coaches to make their ballots public. That request was denied.

The AP votes are public information, and the final individual

ballots were published the same day as the final BCS standings.

The Associated Press has not at any time given permission to the Bowl Championship Series to use its proprietary ranking of college football teams," the AP said in a statement Tuesday.

"This unauthorized use of the AP poll has harmed AP's reputation and interfered with AP's agreements with AP poll voters. To preserve its reputation for honesty and integrity, the AP is asking the BCS to discontinue its unauthorized use of the AP poll as a component of BCS rankings."

Oklahoma's Birdine calls USC's offense 'average'

BY JEFF LATZKE

The Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla.—Get the bulletin board ready: Oklahoma defensive end Larry Birdine thinks Southern California's offense is "average."

Birdine made that known Tuesday in a series of statements that showed he wasn't impressed with the offense the No. 1 Trojans will bring to the Orange Bowl to face the Sooners on Jan. 4.

"I feel like they're, I'd say, a one-and-a-half-man team," Birdine said. "I want to respect them just because I have to play them, but then I watch them on tape and everything, and I realize that they're an average team."

Birdine repeatedly praised Reggie Bush, the Trojans' All-American all-purpose player who returns punts, lines up as a tailback and wide receiver, and finished fifth in the Heisman voting.

But Birdine had little positive to say about Bush's teammates on offense, particularly quarterback Matt Leinart.

"Besides Reggie Bush — he's a great athlete, he's a fast back, he makes plays or whatever — but nobody else stands out to me," Birdine said. "Matt Leinart, he's the Heisman Trophy winner, but he hasn't been driving them — or he hasn't been winning games. Up 'til the last four or five games, Reggie Bush has been their difference-maker."

"We feel like if we take Reggie out of the game, we're gonna win."

Birdine doesn't think Leinart should have won the Heisman — and that's not just because he was rooting for teammates Adrian Peterson and Jason White, who finished second and third.

"If anybody should have won it from USC, it should have been Reggie Bush," Birdine said. "I don't think that [Leinart] was the best quarterback. [Utah's] Alex Smith — he was better than Matt Leinart. I don't think Matt Leinart should have won."

Birdine later added: "He's definitely overrated. Like I said, he's a good quarterback, but he's not a Heisman-winning quarterback."

Birdine said he realized he was providing USC with motivational material and said his opinions didn't necessarily reflect the mind-set of the team.

"I don't know if that's the mood in the locker room," Birdine said.



Oklahoma defensive end Larry Birdine said Heisman Trophy winner Matt Leinart, above, is "definitely overrated."

"I watch them on tape and everything, and I realize that they're an average team."

Larry Birdine

Oklahoma defensive end

"I ask some guys and they say, 'They're good.' I haven't seen them on defense, but if our offense don't turn the ball over and their offense can't score, then I believe we're going to win the game."

Birdine also made the case that second-ranked Oklahoma faced tougher competition in the Big 12 than USC did in the Pac-10.

Not surprisingly, Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops had a far different take on USC.

He called tailback LenDale

White a "great, great player" and said the Trojans' receivers were "very good; I'm going to say that about every position on their team."

Asked about Leinart's positives and negatives, Stoops said the Trojans' quarterback was "very wise and smart the way he plays and the way he's coached. He makes very few poor decisions. He's a great decision-maker. He has a great arm, he's very accurate. He's got the poise you look for in the pocket."

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SPORTS



Arbitrator rules J. O'Neal's suspension should be reduced by 10 games, Page 48

AP wants poll out of BCS

BY RALPH D. RUSSO

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — It looks as if the Bowl Championship Series is headed for another major overhaul.

The Associated Press has told the BCS to stop using its college football poll to determine which teams play for the national title and in the most prestigious bowl games.

Since the BCS was implemented in 1998 by officials from the Big East, Big 12, Big Ten, Atlantic Coast Conference, Pac-10, Southeastern Conference and Notre Dame, the formula it uses to rank teams has been tweaked almost every year. But the AP poll and the ESPN/USA Today coaches poll have always been an integral part.

The AP said such use was never sanctioned and had reached the point where it threatened to undermine the independence and integrity of the poll.

The AP sent BCS coordinator Kevin Weiberg a cease-and-desist letter, dated Dec. 21, stating that use of the poll is unlawful and harms the AP's reputation.

"We respect the decision of the Associated Press to no longer have its poll included in the BCS standings," Weiberg said in a statement Tuesday. "Since the inception of the BCS, the AP poll has been part of our standings. We appreciate the cooperation we have received from the organization in providing rankings on a weekly basis. We will discuss alternatives to the

Associated Press poll at the upcoming BCS meetings and plan to conclude our evaluation of the BCS standings formula, including any other possible changes, by our April meeting."

Where the BCS goes from here won't be determined for a while, but even before the AP made its poll off limits Weiberg had said that the BCS planned to look into the possibility of using a selection committee to create the bowl matchups, much like the NCAA Division I basketball tournament.

This season, the AP and coaches poll were given more weight than ever in the BCS standings. Each poll accounted for one-third of a team's BCS grade and total

points were factored in, not just ranking, which was the case before.

A compilation of six computer rankings made up the final third of teams' BCS grade.

The new system put heightened scrutiny on the two polls.

In its letter, the AP said some of its poll voters had indicated they might no longer participate because of concerns over having their reporters be so closely involved in the process of determining which teams play where.

"By stating that the AP poll is one of the three components used by BCS to establish its rankings, BCS conveys the impression that AP condones or otherwise participates in the BCS system," the letter said.



SEE BCS ON PAGE 53

Jackets jump on Orange



Georgia Tech's Chris Reis, second from left, celebrates with teammates Kenny Scott (2), Nathan Burton (15) and Dawan Landry (20) after intercepting a Syracuse pass and running it in for a TD in the first quarter of the Champs Sports Bowl. See story on Page 53.



James lifts game, team against T-wolves, reigning MVP Garnett

Page 48



Arizona rebounds from dismal game to rout Manhattan

Page 49

L.A. pulls out of deal sending Johnson to N.Y. Page 46

